



# Support for Chronically Ill Learners

Helping such children cope at school

# Why should we be aware of them?

- Their struggle to participate & learn can be very difficult.
- South African School Health Policy protects against discrimination & acknowledges the right to education.
- Strong relationship between children's physical health and their growth, development and learning
- Poor physical health can result in poor self esteem
- Stressful situations can exacerbate some health conditions
- Social & cognitive development affected
- Movement is reduced



# What is chronic illness in a child?

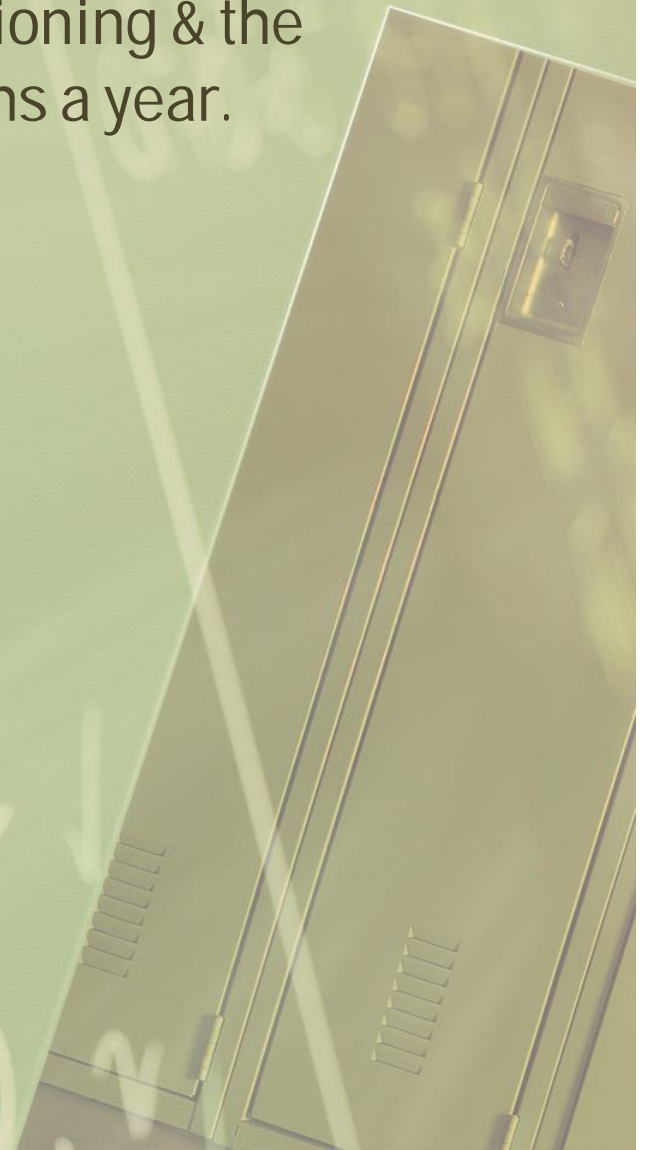
Any disease which interferes with daily functioning & the child's activities for more than three months a year.

Children who are unwell are often:

- Irritable and worried
- Weepy
- Unable to concentrate or pay attention
- Often seen as lazy & disinterested

Chronic illness affects the whole family

- Siblings may feel left out
- Caregiver burnout and stress



Communication with parents/caregivers is essential

**Very important - information may be confidential**

Regular contact should be maintained. The child's condition may change

- medication changed
- Check re precautions for outings or other school events.
- Sick children may be absent – arrangements re sending work home

# Develop an Action Plan

This plan will:

- describe symptoms to look out for
- provide specific information about the management of the illness
- if necessary, provide information about medication to be given and specific dietary requirements.
- give written permission to manage serious situations during the school day.
- Provide contact details and names of health personnel in case more information or help is needed.

This information must be easily accessible.



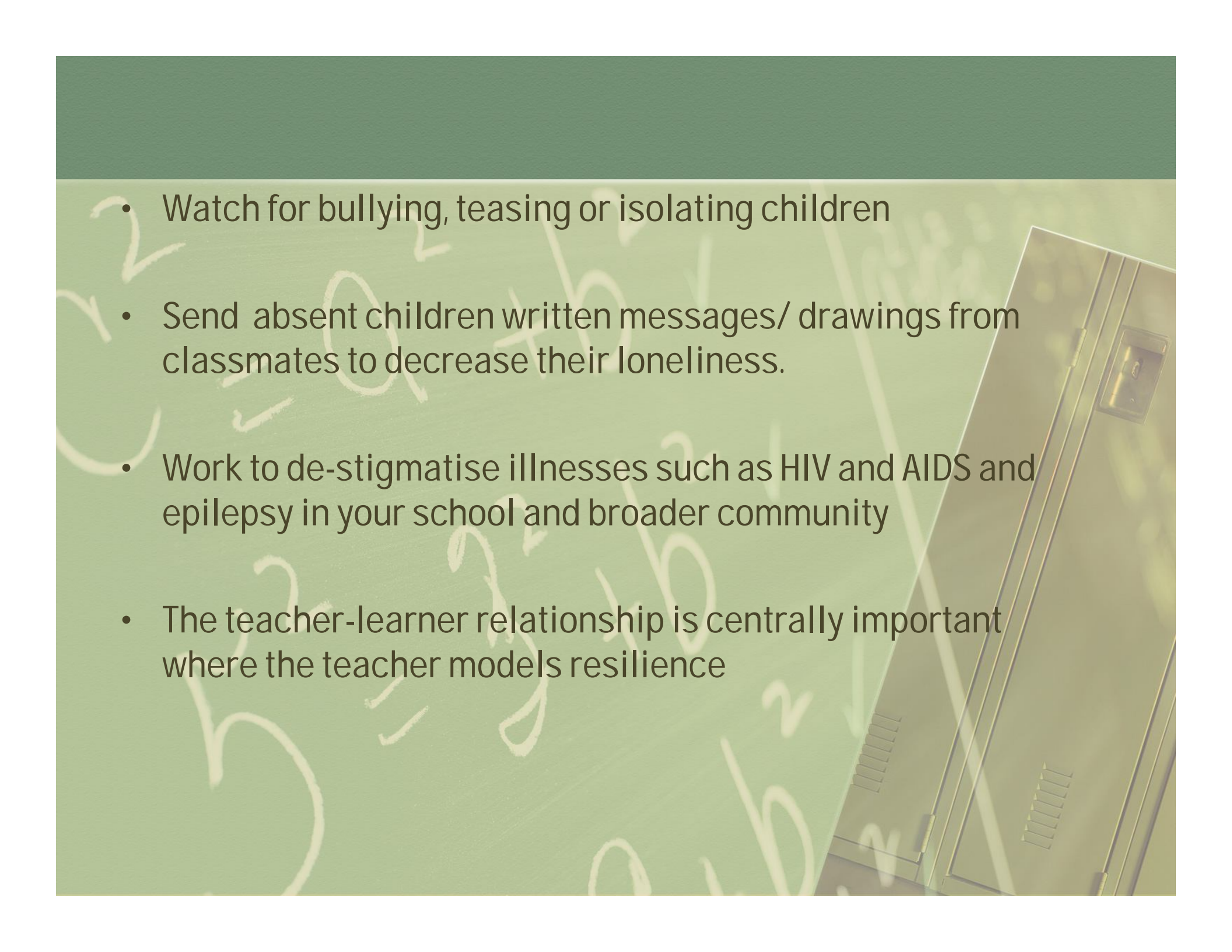
# Encourage Resilience

The capacity to overcome the odds and develop the personal strengths needed to cope with hardship or adversity.

The development of resilience in children is facilitated by a protective environment at school

Practical tips on how to do this:

- No labelling or self fulfilling prophecy
- Do not decide what sick children can and cannot do.
- Safeguard the rights of all children, especially sick ones.  
This means **maintaining confidentiality at all times.**
- Watch for additional health problems and barriers
- Be flexible - make allowances and change routines

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- Watch for bullying, teasing or isolating children
  - Send absent children written messages/ drawings from classmates to decrease their loneliness.
  - Work to de-stigmatise illnesses such as HIV and AIDS and epilepsy in your school and broader community
  - The teacher-learner relationship is centrally important where the teacher models resilience



# Classroom support

- Use Co operative learning groups
- Use Multi-level Teaching: Chronic illness affects learners' achievement levels. Multi-level teaching looks at the strengths of learners, & recognises varied abilities. One lesson is used - learners work on the same topic but at different levels.
- The kind and amount of curriculum differentiation needed can only be decided after a thorough assessment of learners.

Ask yourself practical questions:

- "How long does the learner stay away from school?"
- Does the medication make him/her sleepy or less alert?
- Is he/she experiencing any discomfort ? What will make it easier for him/her to learn?"



# Individual support plans

Drawn up in consultation with the school support team, district support personnel, parents and, if appropriate, the learner.

The ISP describes:

- the actions that need to be taken to address a learner's additional support needs
- sets targets to be achieved
- strategies and resources required to meet these targets
- the criteria by which achievement will be measured
- the person(s) responsible
- the date for review.

# Protective factors continued:

- Building strong school - family links
- Taking advantage of opportunities for positive community involvement
- Involvement in community service - development of resilient characteristics - resourcefulness, initiative, goal setting & pro-social values.

## Developing skills in resourcefulness:

- Knowing strengths & limitations. Keep trying
- Setting, planning and achieving realistic goals - sense of optimism & positive self esteem – I CAN do it!
- Decision making & creative problem solving
- Adaptive distancing from distressing & unalterable situations



- Children with well developed social skills & healthy self esteem are resilient.

- Emotional literacy is a recognised protective factor

### **Management of stress in children**

- Children react to stress in line with developmental level.
- The adjustments children make show a coping style. A successful coping style reduces painful stress.
- An unsuccessful coping style results in feelings of incompetence, discomfort, frustration and/or disappointment.

# Dealing with Death

Be as honest as possible with children

## Strategies for support

- • Most children stay optimistic if those around them have a positive attitude.
- • Give support when facing changes. Accept feelings of discouragement but depression can stop recovery.
- • Encourage the development of new interests.
- • Provide as much certainty as possible by giving explanations the child can understand.
- • Teach the child how to handle stress in different circumstances with positive coping styles.
- • Encourage parents/friends to help child understand the situation by speaking about it.



# Concluding remarks

Life is a bumpy journey & some learners experience extraordinary challenges. Therefore the greater the number of protective resources in their lives, the more likely they are to cope

