

Living and Functioning with Spina Bifida

Andrea Wierzchowski, PhD
Neuropsychologist



Agenda

Introduction

Mental Health & Executive
Functioning

Building confidence

Engaging with Others

Q&A





Overcoming Obstacles



- How do I deal with attention and executive functioning (EF) problems?
 - EF includes:
 - Impulsivity
 - Inhibition
 - Switching between tasks
 - Organizing
 - Planning
 - Working Memory
 - Time Management
- Living with chronic illnesses and physical disabilities can make us vulnerable to mental health concerns
 - Anxiety
 - Depression

The image features a light gray background with decorative white leaf patterns in the corners. The top-left and top-right corners have clusters of several pointed leaves on a stem. The bottom-left and bottom-right corners have clusters of three rounded leaves on a stem. In the center, the text 'The Power of YET' is written in a large, black, serif font. Below it is a thin horizontal line, followed by the text 'NOT EVERYONE YOU MEET WILL UNDERSTAND YOU AND THAT IS OKAY!' in a smaller, gray, sans-serif font.

The Power of YET

NOT EVERYONE YOU MEET WILL UNDERSTAND YOU
AND THAT IS OKAY!



Building Resilience: Mind over Matter

CONFIDENCE-BUILDING
STRATEGIES



- It has been shown that the better your ability to cope with EF difficulties, the better you are able to handle social situations
- Resilience and higher quality of life are attributed to:
 - Positive outlook toward SB
 - Future expectations
 - Family satisfaction and support
 - Coping and Hope

Building Blocks to Enhancing Relationships

Social Acceptance

- Being open to being different
- Closeness-all you need is one good friend

Social Problem Solving

- Communicating necessary information to peers (i.e., social language)
- Understanding the rules of social engagement
- Offer to help someone if needed

General Social Skills

- Make eye contact with others to create a sense of connection
- Confidence in speaking: Take a deep breath, speak slowly and clearly (you do not have to say a lot)
- Effective body language and personal space
- Greet people openly

Social Self-Efficacy (Sticking Up For Yourself)

- Be confident-Address stereotypes



How To Be A Good Friend

Most of us have to work at building and maintaining friendships.

- Communicate if you are going to change or cancel plans
- Communicate your needs and sensitivities
- Be aware of other people's needs, and if you don't know, ask!
- Limit oversharing of personal problems or being repetitive
- Smile, BE POSITIVE!, have gratitude, say thank you
- Try not to take everything personally and if you get frustrated, ask for space
- Try to crack a joke. Don't take yourself or the situation too seriously
- Become more open to saying "Yes"
- Stay calm, pause, and reflect before reacting
- Introduce yourself and participate in small talk
- Ask someone to go to lunch

Qualities in Friends

A good friend will:

- Forget about your limitations
- Be Kind
- Make you laugh
- Truly want to know more about you
- Listen to your troubles
- Give you unconditional acceptance and validation
- Talk through things when they are upset



Engaging Socially

Where to make friends:

- Join a club or community group (Walk-N-Roll for Spina Bifida, Boy and Girl Scouts, church youth groups, YMCA activities, and SBA Chapter events)
- Attend events
- Volunteer
- Join a life-skills or social skills group in the community
- Sign up to learn a new skills or craft
- Reach out to past friends you have lost touch with
- Participate in after-work activities



Q&A



Thank you!

Andrea Wierchowski, PhD

Andrea.Wierchowski@tsrh.org