



Speaking from Experience Asthma in Childhood

Transcript for chapter 7 of 12: Childcare and school

Paul, Vicky and Michelle (who has asthma): I was paranoid. It was just awful, because in her last four or five months of kinder, whenever they went outside and ran around outside, she would have an asthma attack and need ventolin. I was just beside myself as to how this was going to happen every play time and every lunch time. Even though we resumed her on quite a significant dose of pulmicort, so that it would hopefully keep those things at bay, every time the phone rang in those initial few months of her starting school, I was sure it would be the secretary from the office saying, "Excuse me, but Michelle is having an asthma attack."

Marilyn (has three sons with asthma) and Matthew: When Matthew and his eldest brother started school, I was concerned that no one else would be able to look after them as well as I could. That was my biggest concern. Who would be able to recognise if his asthma was getting worse at school? Would he be able to take his own medication?

Susan (has three children with asthma): We live directly opposite the school where Madeline started school. So I was always on call if they needed me to come in. Now teachers have a policy that they have to follow with asthma. But in those days they just tried to get the kids home as quickly as possible, or called an ambulance. But it was very difficult, because you would write screeds of information for the teachers and hope that they have read it. And you would try to have a dialogue with teachers about what to look for. But symptoms are so individual for each child, that often only the mother feels like she has the control. So letting the control go is very, very difficult.

Paul, Vicky and Michelle: Because so many children do have asthma, but to a very mild and easily manageable degree, it is very difficult for some schools or people to see the extremity of what asthma can be for, albeit a very small proportion, of children.

Vladamier (has a son with asthma): My wife's a school teacher, so she took the trouble of going up and seeing them, and saying, "If this happens, then this is how it is to be dealt with. And here's a mobile number, and here's this number, etc." So we were fairly confident about it. But there was no formal training back in those days for teachers, as to what to do.

Paul, Vicky and Michelle: The first time she did have an asthma attack at school, it just went completely wrong. I wasn't at home, unfortunately, when they did ring and so they rang my husband. They couldn't find her medication and they had asked her to search her bag - and she was having trouble breathing - rather than one of the teachers doing it for her. The other medication we had for in the sickbay, they couldn't find. It was just a nightmare. So they had to give her someone else's medication. I remember when Paul rang me, when I did get home, and told me about it, I just thought, my goodness, this is a nightmare. But subsequent to that, we went through it all again with them and I know that the Asthma Foundation came and spoke to the school.



Susan: Even if you think it's a bizarre sort of warning sign, tell them anyway. Because you know your child best and if there's any significant symptoms they should be watching out for. Try and choose carers who are proactive, and not carers who will sit back and think "I'll only call the ambulance when it's necessary. I'll call mum when things are out of control."

Lavinia and Geoff (have two daughters with asthma): Once they were taught, and they had a bit of literature on what it actually is, it seemed to go a bit better.

Lavinia and Geoff: Yeah, they weren't as frightened of it. They knew what to do. The minute somebody says "Well, this is what you do when this happens", and you set up your management plan or whatever you want to call it, they felt better within those boundaries and they would just do it. But it was probably about grade three or four by the time we got all of that rolling properly, and that I would send her to school and not worry about her. And then you went on all of the school camps!

Paul, Vicky and Michelle: I never felt discriminated against because of her, at the kinder. For example, because she has had so many dietary restrictions, they were very good in altering any recipes or any cooking-type activities they did with the children.

Marilyn and Matthew: I found that the teaching staff were very cooperative. They needed to have a good understanding and grounding of the condition that was particular for our children. They were always very willing to learn and understand the condition, and were always willing to help as much as possible. They knew particularly when my boys started school that I wasn't working and I was at home - so I was freely available as well. So they always had that back-up, that I would come to school and pick them up. So there was a good kind of trust between the teachers and both Matthew and I.

Vladamier: There were times, when he was young, that he just gave away taking it because he felt different and he was being put down by his peer group because he had it. But then he realised that he wasn't going to get rid of this thing, and if he didn't take it, then he was the one who suffered in the end.

Marilyn: They sort of feel like, particularly my eldest son when he started secondary school, that he was the only one who had asthma, and that he was the only one who had medication. When he went on a trip with the school, he didn't want to take his medication with him because he thought he was the only one. He soon found out that he was one of many in his classroom, including his teacher.

Lavinia and Geoff: This year she has had a pretty reasonable year. What was her report? 13.5 days off. But there has been times when she has been away for a third of the year, and that was very early in her schooling. At some stage this year her grade six teacher decided - particularly because she had her in grade prep as well - that when she was away so often, she felt that some of her writing wasn't forming properly, because she wasn't there for a lot of it. And when she was there she was so shaky and jittery because she was so unstable at that stage, and using high amounts of ventolin. And again when she started the serevent a few years ago, before she had grown a bit and was able to tolerate that, she became very shaky and jittery and the writing didn't flow very well. So she just chose not to do that. So they felt that that did affect it there for a little while. She's very bright, Gem, and very determined, so she really hasn't fallen behind in anything at all.



Gemma (has asthma): When I was little, I had a lot of time off school. The sort of did affect me, but not really. And now I hardly have any time off school.