

# They Think It's the Way They Should Be

## Classmates and Teammates Pitch In

**A**s with all kids, it is beneficial for children with epilepsy to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities. Such activities are a great way for children with seizures to make new friends, develop skills and build self-confidence.

Some activities, such as swimming and climbing, will require extra supervision and may not be advised by the child's doctor. But, when teachers and coaches are properly prepared and when reasonable safety guidelines are followed, children who have seizures can have a positive, enjoyable experience. As Derrick Roberts found out, your teammates can also make a big difference.

Derrick, a ninth grader in Oxford, Ind., isn't new to seizures on or off the field. He has had epilepsy since he was a young child. From the beginning, other children helped out.

"Derrick's first grade teacher is responsible to the biggest extent for the way that other kids in school responded to him," Derrick's mother, Donna, explained. "She felt that they weren't too young to carry out small tasks to help out when Derrick had a seizure."

Derrick's teacher established a buddy system, pairing each child with a buddy to walk to the office or other places in the school building. That way, Derrick wasn't singled out. Then, as part of the rotating classroom jobs, one student each week was assigned to go across the hall and get a second adult if the teacher needed assistance during a seizure. The boys went as a group to the restroom.

"The kids knew how to handle seizures and they also knew the signs of one," Donna Roberts said. One year, Derrick spent some time in the hospital and then went back to school. He was walking to the resource room with another student when he had a seizure. The other student stayed with him. "He told someone that Derrick was his responsibility and that he refused to leave him. What a friend."

Derrick's friends were also supportive outside the classroom. When he was in the fourth grade, he decided to play baseball. The rules required that all children have playing time, but it was a difficult summer for Derrick, who was having frequent seizures. "Sometimes he would go up to bat and make it for a while and sometimes he would have a seizure right away," his mother recalled. "It seemed to always happen when there were one or two kids on base."

The umpire agreed to allow Derrick's mother and the coach to run onto the field when Derrick had a seizure, but not to stop the game. Donna was impressed by what her son's teammates decided to do.

"Every single game, the kids stood as still as statues when (Derrick) went down and the coach and I went running out. The other team would score, and that was just fine with his teammates. The coach told the kids they could pick up the ball and play it out, but the kids said, no, it was more important that Derrick was OK."

Once, Roberts was sitting in the stands when Derrick had a seizure and she heard another mother yelling, "Why the heck are they all just standing there?" Roberts ran onto the field and then came back and explained to the other mother about Derrick's seizures and his teammates' practice of standing still and waiting for him.

"She asked me if the children had been coached to do it. I told her, no, it was just something they chose to do. They seem to think it's the way they should be. At the next game, I heard a grandfather screaming at his grandson to stop standing there and the mother whom I had talked to told him what was up. She asked him not to stop the children because they were showing respect for a teammate. Later, that grandfather told me that Derrick was the luckiest kid on earth to have such great friends and teammates."

Derrick hasn't always been so lucky. In middle school, he had some trouble with bullies who picked on him in the restroom and tripped him in the cafeteria. Because Derrick has difficulty remembering names, he couldn't tell his teachers who the bullies were. Other students, including old classmates from elementary school and friends from his middle school basketball team, stepped in to help him and to identify the bullies.



*Derrick Roberts, a ninth grader from Indiana, has had seizures since he was a young child.*

“Derrick's first-grade teacher is responsible to the biggest extent for the way that other kids in school responded to him. She felt that they weren't too young to carry out small tasks to help out when Derrick had a seizure.” **DONNA ROBERTS, Derrick's mother**

**CHECK IT OUT:** *Seizures and You: Take Charge of the Facts* is a proven epilepsy awareness program targeting teenagers in middle and high school. It is designed to educate teens, dispel myths and reduce the perceived stigma associated with epilepsy. If you are interested in bringing this program to your school, please contact your local Epilepsy Foundation affiliate. To look up your local affiliate, go to [epilepsyfoundation.org/aboutus/AffiliateLookup.cfm](http://epilepsyfoundation.org/aboutus/AffiliateLookup.cfm)