

# From the Early Years to College



As child amputees grow, the issues their families face change. The concerns a parent might have as their child enters kindergarten are not the same as when their child enters the teen years or later heads off to college. By recognizing some of the challenges they will face, families can be prepared to address them and feel more confident.

## Early Years

When a child amputee is an infant or toddler, their family members have to deal with the challenges surrounding the child's amputation. Such challenges can include staring and comments or questions from strangers while in public. Parents also have to adjust to dealing with the professionals who will be involved in their child's care – this can be intimidating as it is all so new. There are no wrong questions, so don't be afraid to address your concerns during your child's medical appointments.

It's important for families to develop a positive approach to challenges, which includes teaching siblings how to deal with questions. Making a point of being open and positive will mean that people around your child will have a similar attitude.

Around the age of two or three, children start to vocalize and ask questions about their limb differences. At this stage, parents can spend time rehearsing with their child how to respond to questions they might be asked, especially if they attend daycare or preschool. Practising appropriate responses at home gives the child confidence so they will not be taken by surprise when questions arise. Instead, they will have some ready responses if teasing is encountered. For very young children, explanations should be very simple and you can provide more detail later when your child is ready.

Starting school is an exciting but sometimes anxious time for parents. The CHAMP Program has developed a Starting School Kit to help parents and teachers ensure the child has a smooth integration into their new class or group. The kit contains the CHAMP Resource Kit DVD along with guidelines and tips on making a presentation

to introduce the child to their new group. This type of presentation provides an opportunity for classmates to have all their questions answered. This way, since young children are naturally very curious, your child will not get the same questions repetitively from classmates.

The War Amps

## Starting School

Daycare, new activities or groups, changing schools – CHAMP can help!

To order a Starting School Kit, call CHAMP at **1 800 267-4023** or email **champ@waramps.ca**.

## Preteen and Teen Years

During the preteen years, there are many pertinent issues for amputees – the big ones being body image and relationships, transitions through the school years, getting a job and driving.

Sometimes an amputee who has always been very comfortable with their amputation may suddenly start feeling more sensitive or self-conscious. They may not want their amputation to be visible or to talk about

it with others. They may stop wearing short sleeves or shorts, and may even stop taking part in certain activities in which their amputation would be visible. This period can be disconcerting for parents, who wonder why their child suddenly has issues surrounding their amputation when in all the previous years, there were no signs of difficulties with acceptance. It is important for parents to know that it is not uncommon for amputees to go through such a phase – some young people just experience it more intensely than others. Most young amputees will once again become comfortable with their amputation and artificial limbs by the time they reach their mid to late teens.

Sports and physical education may also become a greater issue at this time. Amputees who have previously participated in sports without a problem may now find they simply cannot keep up as team sports become more competitive. Most amputees who are keen on sports do continue to play, but may just adapt how they participate – for instance, a leg amputee might play

the position of goalie so that less running is involved. There are, of course, those who are “natural athletes” and are able to continue competitively. It is important to recognize that participation in competitive sports may become an issue that amputees face during these years. There are alternatives that can enable some amputees to continue their involvement with the sport, while other amputees’ interests might switch to different activities (e.g., computer club, drama club, student council) as a way of staying involved and having fun with their peers.

## College and University Years

Post-secondary and continuing education is encouraged for amputees, as it opens up many career opportunities. For some, certain jobs that have tremendous physical demands, such as working construction, may not be possible or may be very difficult. The job market today is highly competitive, and having a good education will ensure that employers focus on what the candidate can contribute and not their amputation.

Heading off to college or university can be a little frightening for amputees and their parents. They will meet many new people they will have to explain their amputation to, as the environment is totally new. When choosing a college or university, it is a good idea to do some research on the layout of the campus. For example, a leg amputee may have a harder time getting around between classes on a large campus. Most colleges and universities have offices and programs to assist students with disabilities, so it is a good idea to touch base with this resource.

A young amputee is no different than any other college student in that there is always concern and excitement as they take this step towards independence. There is simply the additional requirement of considering the needs that their amputation imposes, and finding ways to address them.

*With more than a century of expertise, The War Amps offers comprehensive information on all aspects of living with amputation. The War Amps is not affiliated with any prosthetic/orthotic manufacturer or supplier and does not endorse any specific product or treatment. Please consult your health-care provider to determine the course of care that is best for you.*



In our *Teen Talk* video series, we feature fellow Champs and CHAMP grads who have “been there” and can share advice from an amputee’s perspective. These videos offer guidance on getting your licence and driving, meeting people for the first time, and much more! To watch our *Teen Talk* video series, visit the CHAMP website at [champ.waramps.ca](http://champ.waramps.ca).