



From the Early Years to College

As a child amputee grows, the issues families face change. What is of concern for a parent as their child enters kindergarten is not the same as when the child enters the teen years or later heads off to college. By recognizing what some of the issues will be, families can be prepared to address them and, thus, feel more confident.

Early Years

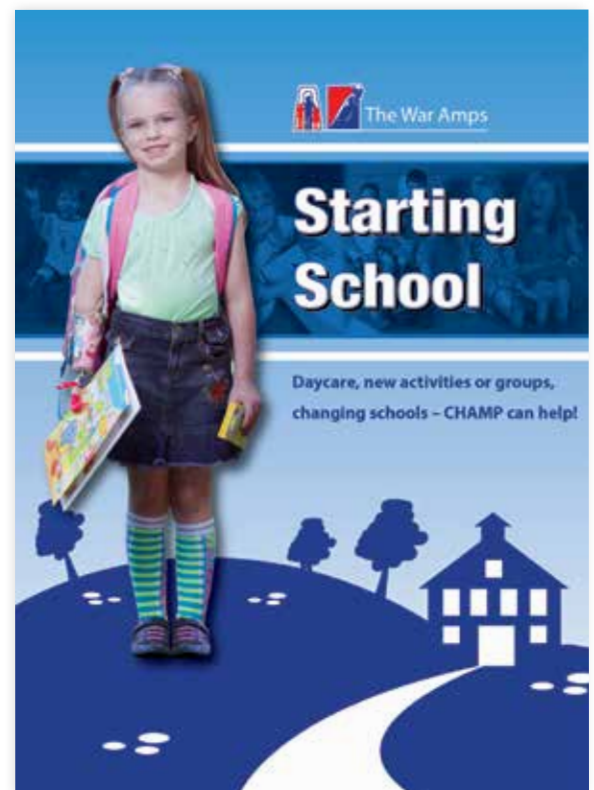
When a child amputee is an infant or toddler, it is the parents and other family members who have to deal with the issues surrounding the child's amputation, such as handling staring, and questions and comments when in public. Parents also have to adjust to dealing with the professionals who will be involved in the child's care – this can be intimidating as it is all so new to parents. Just remember, no questions are stupid, so as parents, make sure to write down everything that crosses your mind that you would like explained and be certain to get these issues addressed when you go for the next appointment. That is the only way you will feel confident in your child's care.

Families must develop a positive approach, which includes teaching brothers and sisters of the child amputee how to deal with questions. Though, admittedly, there will be times when the parents will wish they didn't have to address these issues, making a point of being open and positive will mean that people around the child amputee will have a similar attitude.

It is when the child is around age two or three that he/she starts to vocalize and ask questions about their "difference." At this stage, parents can spend time rehearsing with the child how to respond to questions they might be asked, especially if they attend daycare or preschool. Practising appropriate responses at home,

before the child gets the questions outside the home (which is inevitable), gives the child confidence, and he/she will not be taken off guard with questions but instead will have some ready responses if teasing is encountered. Of course, for very young children, explanations should be very simple and you can provide more detail later when the 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 go into their child's school and make a presentation to the class to introduce the child amputee. The kit contains the CHAMP Resource Kit DVD along with guidelines and tips on making a presentation. This type of presentation provides an opportunity for classmates to have all their questions answered



at once. This way, since young children are naturally very curious and will ask questions, the child amputee does not get the same questions over and over from classmates.

Pre-Teen and Teen Years

During the pre-teen 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 about it as body image becomes more important at this age. They may not want the amputation to be visible or may not want to talk about it with others. They may stop wearing shorts or T-shirts, and even stop taking part in certain activities in which the amputation would be visible. This period can be disconcerting for parents who wonder why the amputee suddenly has issues surrounding the amputation, when in all the previous years, there was no sign of difficulties with acceptance. It is important for

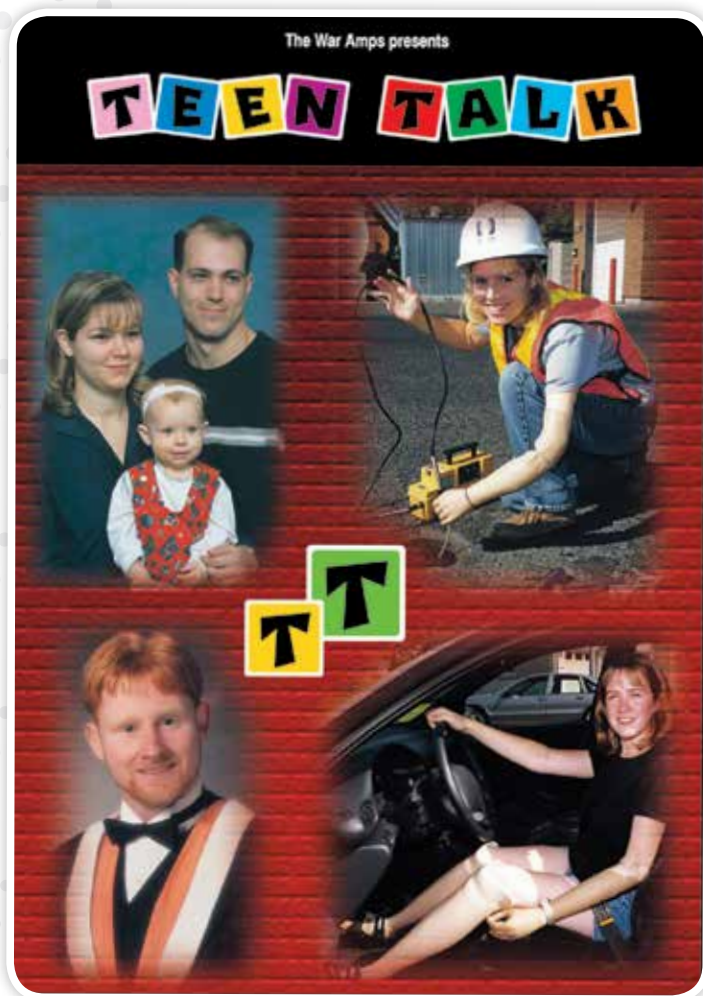
parents to know that it is not uncommon for amputees to go through such a phase – some young people just experience it more intensely than others. Most children will once again become comfortable with their amputation and/or artificial limb(s) by the time they reach their mid to late teens.

Sports and physical education may also become a greater issue at this time. Amputees who have previously participated in sports without 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 participate, 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 who are able to continue competitively. It is important simply to recognize that participation in competitive sports may become an issue the amputee will face during these years. There are alternatives which enable the amputee to continue their involvement with the sport, while other amputees’ interests might switch to different activities, like clubs (e.g., computer club, drama club, student council), as a way of staying involved and having fun with school mates.

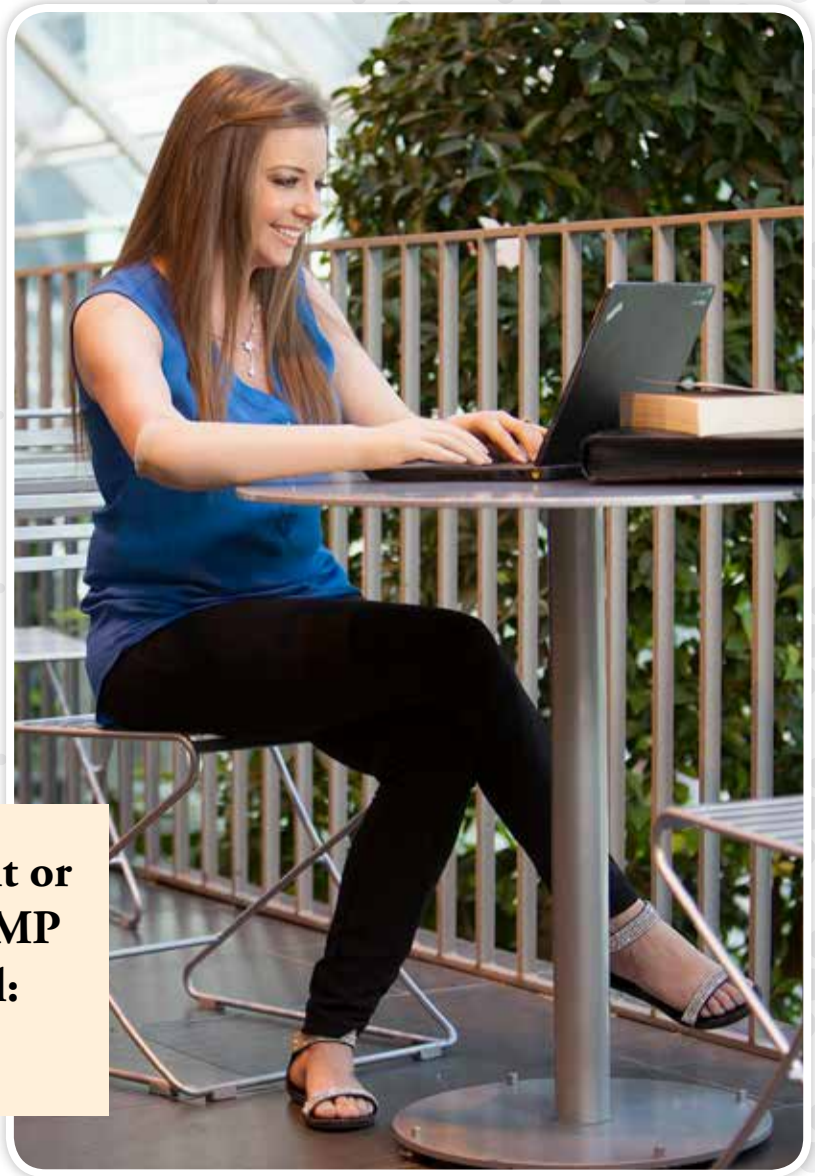
College and University Years

Post-secondary and continuing education is encouraged for amputees as it opens up many career opportunities for them. Amputees must be realistic, and for some, certain jobs that have tremendous physical demands, such as working construction, may not be possible or at least be very difficult. The job market today is highly competitive and you need marketable job skills to bring to a potential employer. Having a good education will ensure the employer focuses on what you can contribute and not the amputation.

Heading off to college or university is a little frightening for the amputee and his/her parents. The amputee must meet a bunch of new people and again will have to explain his/her amputation 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. If you are, for example, a leg amputee, then getting around between classes on a large campus may be an issue. Most colleges and universities have offices/programs to assist individuals 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 your amputation(s) impose, and finding ways to address them.



**To obtain a Starting School Kit or
the Teen Talk video call CHAMP
at 1 800 267-4023 or email:
champ@waramps.ca.**