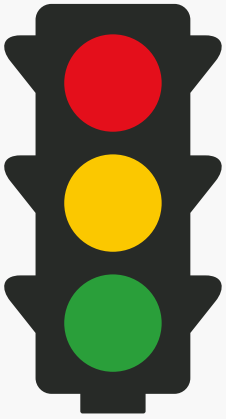
U.S. PAIN FOUNDATION

SUPPORTING STUDENTS LIVING WITH CHRONIC PAIN



What is the Red-Yellow-Green Light System?

Children living with chronic pain often experience fluctuating physical and emotional symptoms from day to day—or even hour to hour. To help teachers, school staff, and classmates better understand how a student is feeling at any given moment, consider using the **Red-Yellow-Green Light System.**

Each student displays a simple color indicator—such as a sticker, badge, or card—so educators can quickly gauge how to best support them in class. This tool allows for more compassionate, flexible learning environments, while also empowering students to express their needs in a subtle, judgment-free way.

Why the System Works

Empowers Students
Gives children a safe, simple method to self-advocate—no explanations necessary.

Supports Teachers
Offers immediate insight into a student's well-being to guide daily expectations and accommodations.

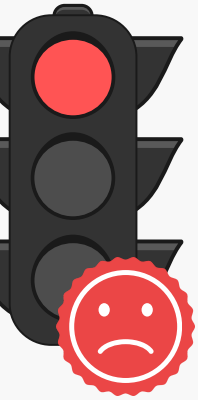
Builds Understanding
Fosters empathy and awareness among peers, reducing stigma around chronic pain.

Promotes Inclusion
Ensures students with pain can remain engaged, included, and supported in their classroom community.

This system isn't about labeling—it's about listening. It offers children a way to say, *"Here's what I need today,"* without pressure or fear of being misunderstood.

Each day may bring different challenges for a student with chronic pain. By recognizing and responding to these simple color signals, you can help create a classroom culture where all students feel seen, respected, and capable of learning and thriving.

RED LIGHT: "I'M REALLY STRUGGLING."



Meaning:
Today is a tough day. The student is in significant pain or discomfort. They want to be at school but need space, understanding, and minimal pressure.

How Teachers Can Help:

- Avoid calling on the student to participate or answer questions.
- Offer quiet activities or a comfortable space if needed.
- Acknowledge their effort in showing up—sometimes just being present is a victory.

Example:
A child with a migraine or pain flare-up comes to school but keeps their head down and prefers to listen quietly.

YELLOW LIGHT: "I'M TRYING, BUT IT'S A HARD DAY."

Meaning:
The student isn't feeling their best but wants to participate when possible. They may need breaks or lighter workloads.

How Teachers Can Help:

- Check in discreetly and ask if they'd like to participate.
- Allow flexibility with assignments or physical activity.
- Encourage effort without pushing too hard.

Example:
A child is experiencing mild pain and can work in small bursts, but needs to rest their head occasionally or take short breaks.

GREEN LIGHT: "I'M FEELING GOOD AND READY TO LEARN!"

Meaning:
Today is a good day! The student feels well enough to participate fully in class activities.

How Teachers Can Help:

- Treat the student as you would any other classmate.
- Encourage them to engage, contribute, and enjoy the day.
- Celebrate their participation and progress.

Example:
A child feels energized, raises their hand to answer questions, or joins in group work enthusiastically.