

Helping Students Recover from a Concussion

Concussion Education for School Professionals



OSF HEALTHCARE
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WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury that changes the way the brain normally works. Children and adolescents are among those at greatest risk for concussion. Proper recognition and response to concussion can prevent further injury and help with recovery. All concussions are serious and affect people differently. Most will have symptoms for a few days to weeks, but more serious injuries can last weeks to months.

RECOGNIZING A CONCUSSION

Teachers and school staff may be the first to notice changes in their students. Send a student to the school nurse or office if you notice or suspect a student has suffered any kind of forceful blow to the head or the body that results in rapid movement of the head and any change in behavior, thinking or physical functioning.

COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF A CONCUSSION

The signs and symptoms of concussion can show up immediately after an injury or they may not appear or be noticed until hours or days later. Possible signs:

- Headache
- Fatigue
- Blurry or double vision
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Trouble thinking or concentrating
- Feeling slowed down
- Behavioral changes

WARNING SIGNS OF CONCUSSION

A student should be seen in an emergency department right away if they have any of the following symptoms:

- One pupil larger than another
- Drowsiness or cannot be awakened
- Headache that gets worse or does not go away
- Weakness or numbness
- Decreased coordination
- Repeated vomiting
- Slurred speech
- Convulsions or seizures
- Difficulty recognizing people or places
- Unusual behavior
- Increasing confusion or restlessness
- Loss of consciousness

RETURNING TO SCHOOL AFTER A CONCUSSION

Cognitive difficulties following a concussion can impact a student's learning capabilities. There is increasing evidence that using a concussed brain to learn may worsen concussion symptoms and even prolong recovery. Resting after concussion is critical because it helps the brain recover.

The goal during concussion recovery is to avoid overexerting the brain and worsening or reproducing symptoms. Mental and cognitive exertion requires the brain's energy, and when the brain's energy is depleted due to injury, symptoms such as headaches and poor concentration can worsen.

Following a gradual sequence to return to school is recommended. Limit cognitive activity to a level that is tolerable and does not worsen concussion symptoms or cause them to return. Supporting a student recovering from a concussion requires a collaborative approach. The school nurse is often an important liaison between student, teachers, parents and health care provider.





ACCOMMODATING A STUDENT WITH CONCUSSION

The accommodations for each student should be individualized based on developmental age and symptoms. As a student's symptoms decrease, the extra help or support can be removed gradually. The rate of recovery can vary from one student to another. Monitoring symptoms and including input from the student is critical in a successful return to learn plan.

Making short-term changes to a student's work load and schedule can help ease them back to their regular school routine. As they begin to feel better, you can slowly remove these changes.

Recommended accommodations:

- Fewer hours spent at school
- Flexible start times
- Rest breaks as needed
- Avoid noisy and over-stimulating environments
- Reduce homework & extra time allowed to complete it
- More time to take tests & less questions
- Reduce time spent reading, writing or on computer
- Eliminate make-up work from missed days
- Avoid recess, physical education and sports until approved

"You cannot see a concussion. Your student may look fine on the outside, but the effects of a concussion can be serious."

WHAT TO WATCH FOR AFTER CONCUSSION

When students return to school after concussion watch for:

- Increased problems paying attention or concentrating
- Increased problems remembering or learning
- Longer time needed to complete tasks
- Difficulty organizing tasks or shifting between tasks
- Difficulty handling a stimulating school environment
- Less able to cope with stress or is more emotional

It is normal for students to feel frustrated, sad and even angry because they cannot return to PE, recess or sports right away or cannot keep up with school work. A student may also feel isolated from peers and social networks. Talk with them about these issues and offer support and encouragement.

RETURNING TO ACTIVITY AFTER CONCUSSION

Children and adolescents should never return to sports or recreation activities on the same day they suffer a concussion. They should delay returning to activities until evaluated by a health care provider who will provide recommendations for when and how the student can return to activities. This means, until permitted, not returning to PE class, sports practice or games, or physical activity at recess.

Once a student is cleared to resume activities it should be done in a gradual manner just like returning to school.

