Helping Students Recover from a Concussion: Classroom Tips for Teachers

How can I help students who are recovering from a concussion?

As a teacher, you play an important role in helping students recover from a concussion as they return to school. Making short-term changes to your students' school work load and schedule—and giving them the time to help their brain heal—can help them get back to their regular school routine. As they begin to feel better, you can slowly remove these changes.

Concussion symptoms may return as students get back to physical or mental activities, so be sure to watch out for any worsening symptoms (such as headaches, a hard time concentrating, and/or nausea) and update their parents.

Before choosing what changes you will make:

- Work with students and their parents to identify the type and length of activities your students can handle and create a plan on how to address any school work they may have missed.
- Tailor the plan to each student. Take into account your student's age, types of symptoms, level of understanding, and emotional status. No two students are alike in the concussion symptoms they have and how they recover from a concussion.
- Coordinate the classroom changes with your students' other teachers and other school professionals, so they have the same level of support throughout the school day.

Below are some general tips that may help your students slowly get back into their school routine:

- Allow them to spend fewer hours at school until symptoms lessen.
- Excuse them from physical activities, such as recess, physical education (PE) class, and sports, until approved by a health care professional who has experience treating concussions.
- Help them avoid noisy and over-stimulating environments if these activities make their symptoms worse.
- Allow them to take more time on tests or assignments and consider rescheduling testing.
- Plan for times during the day when they can take time to rest.
- For older students, consider rescheduling, dropping, or auditing more difficult or elective classes without penalty if they need support for a long period of time.

Changes You Can Make Based on Type of Concussion Symptoms

THINKING/REMEMBERING
(such as having difficulty thinking clearly or concentrating, feeling slowed down)

- Reduce class assignments and homework to key tasks only and base grades on adjusted work.
- Provide extra time to work on class assignments.
- Provide written instructions and help for homework and classwork.
- Allow extra time to take tests, limit tests to one per day, and/or provide study guides.
- Allow your students to show they understand a concept orally instead of in writing.
- Provide class notes and/or allow students to use a computer or tape recorder to record classroom information.

FATIGUE/SLEEP AND PHYSICAL
(such as feeling tired, having no energy, having headaches or dizziness)

- Allow time to visit the school nurse for treatment of headaches or other symptoms.
- Provide rest breaks.
- Give your students extra time to go from class to class, to avoid crowds.
- If bothered by light, allow your students to wear sunglasses or sit in a place that is less bright (e.g., draw blinds, sit away from window).
- If bothered by noise, provide a quiet place for your students to study, take a test, or spend lunch or recess.
- Do not substitute concentration activities for physical activity (e.g., do not assign reading instead of PE).

EMOTIONAL
(such as feeling sad, irritable, anxious)

- Develop an emotional support plan for your students (e.g., identify an adult to whom they can talk if feeling overwhelmed).
- Locate a quiet place for your students to go to if they feel overwhelmed. And provide information on how they can safely get to this quiet location.
- Students may benefit from continued involvement in certain extracurricular activities during their recovery. Identify student and family preferences and consider these activities, approved by their health care provider, in relation to rest time and academic work.

Types of formal support services

For most students, only short-term changes or support services are needed as they recover from a concussion. However, a variety of formal support services may be available to help students who are experiencing a longer or more difficult recovery. These support services may vary widely among states and school districts. The type of support will differ depending on the specific needs of each student. Support services may include:

- Response to Intervention Protocol (RTI)
- 504 Plan
- Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Be sure to check to see what support services are available in your school or district.

You can't see a concussion and your students may look fine on the outside. However, the effects of a concussion can be serious. Helping your students slowly return to learning may lower their chances of experiencing worsening symptoms and a longer recovery.

For more detailed information on helping students return to school after a concussion, download "Returning to School After a Concussion: A Fact Sheet for School Professionals" at: www.cdc.gov/concussion/HeadsUp/schools.html.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/Concussion.