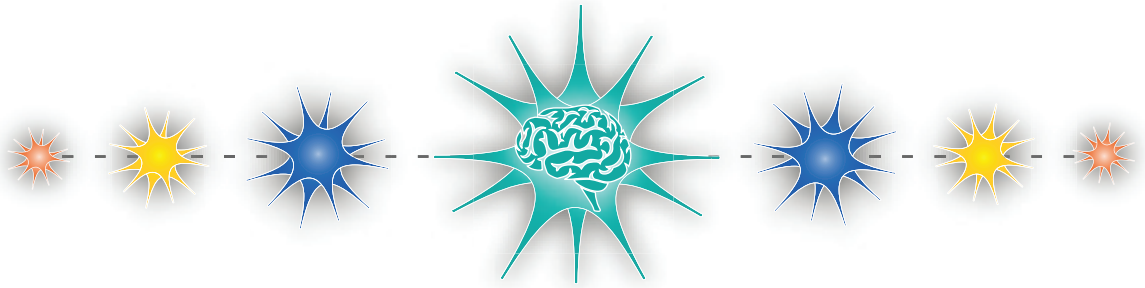
WHEN CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS ARE NOT GOING AWAY

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN WHO ARE SCHOOL-AGED



HAS YOUR CHILD HAD A CONCUSSION?

If your child has a concussion, also called a mild brain injury, there are certain steps you should take to help ease their symptoms. Usually concussion symptoms will clear by three months. For most children, symptoms will go away in two to four weeks. However, some children have symptoms that last longer than three months.

If you have a child in school, three months is too long to wait and see if symptoms go away. You need to take action earlier, along with the school, to help your child do well in school and stay up-to-date.

Here are some steps you should take when your child has a head injury.

FIRST THING AFTER INJURY

- Go to the doctor or emergency department.
- Follow the doctor's care plan. Watch your child carefully for changes.
- Have your child rest for the first one to three days as needed.
- Get a doctor's letter stating that your child has a concussion (or mild brain injury).
- Give copies of the letter to all teachers and coaches, as well as the school nurse and principal. Keep a copy for yourself.

FIRST FEW DAYS TO WEEKS AFTER INJURY

After three days, make sure your child does not rest too much or have too much activity. It is safest to find a balance.

FOR A CHILD IN DAYCARE OR AT PRESCHOOL

School personnel should put the doctor's letter into your child's medical chart and school file. Even if your child seems well now, they may have problems later as their brain matures. As your child goes back to school, make sure to:

- Ease the child back into school when they can focus for at least 30 minutes. Start with half days.
- Ask the teacher to make simple changes to help your child's symptoms. For example, if your child had a broken arm, another student would take notes for him until it heals. There are other changes that could help at any time:
  - Rest with head down and/or eyes closed
  - Take "brain breaks" in a quiet room
  - Wear a hat or turn down the lights
  - Use earplugs
- Have the teachers track your child's symptoms and note which changes are helping. Use different types of changes as needed.
- Make a clear plan with the teachers to assign only **the most needed** classwork and homework. Students should **make up** only the most needed work.

FOUR TO SIX WEEKS AFTER INJURY

Is your child still having problems? It may be time to make the classroom changes more official with a **504 Plan** at school. A 504 Plan is a formal plan made just for your child. The plan includes supports the school gives to help your child to do his or her best. The changes or supports stop a little at a time when your child no longer needs them. The changes are called "accommodations" in a 504 Plan.

Examples of these changes (accommodations) may include:

- Longer time for exams or classwork
- "Brain breaks" as needed
- Sunglasses to help with headaches
- Checklists for school work and homework

If state testing is coming up soon, your child may need a 504 Plan quickly. This plan will allow for more time on a test. A doctor can also write a letter asking that the child skip testing for now.

Remember - You can speak up for your child. Trust your gut. Stay involved.

Watch symptoms over time. Update your child's doctor. Stay in contact with the school. Concussion symptoms are real. Symptoms tell you that the brain is still healing and needs time and supports at home and school.

"Bad" behavior is sometimes the first sign that a child has had a brain injury. Your child may be confused about what is happening. Your child may be frustrated or angry about changes. They may not have the words to explain these feelings. Be patient. Dig deeper. Try to find out if the difficulty is with their thinking, listening, or talking. Ask your child's teacher to help.

THREE MONTHS AFTER INJURY

Is your child still facing problems? It may be time to do two things:

- Ask the school to test your child for needed services. Ask this **in writing**.
- Ask the school about scheduling a "neuropsychological evaluation". This is a different test done by a brain specialist (neuropsychologist). This person is trained to understand how the brain is working. They will test the most basic parts of learning like attention, memory, and organization. They will give ideas about how to best teach your child and helpful changes for the classroom.
    - With this test and input, you and the school will decide whether to keep (or start) a 504 Plan. Or, it might be best to make an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** for your child. An IEP might include working with a Special Educator, Speech Therapist, or Occupational Therapist at school
    - See Tennessee's Support & Training for Exceptional Parents Program (STEP) for help with the special education process. For more help, see the Center on Brain Injury Research and Training website.

ONE OR MORE YEARS AFTER INJURY

Sometimes symptoms seem to get better quickly. Then problems may appear in school a year or more after your child's head injury. The brain matures as children grow older. We do not use some skills until we are old enough to need them.

- Ask for testing by the school if your child is having any type of problem. This might include learning, behavior, emotions, or thinking.
    - See the steps listed under "Three Months After Injury"
- Tell the teachers about your child's injury each new school year. Ask them to look for any signs of difficulty. Talking with teachers ahead of time can prevent bigger problems.

In some areas there are special clinics that focus just on concussion symptoms. Talk to your doctor about whether these are right for your child.

Returning to Sports and Other Physical Activity

Student athletes must be cleared by a medical professional before returning to play. This person should be trained in concussion care. They will probably recommend a gradual return to sports.

Your child should not return to a sport when they are still taking medicine to control pain. They should not return to sports when they need changes or adjustments in their classes.

THINGS TO WATCH FOR OVER TIME (*CHECK THOSE THAT YOU SEE*)

- ☐ Mood swings, gets mad easily and changes in personality
- ☐ Trouble with attention and thinking
- ☐ Memory problems, especially things that just happened
- ☐ Anxiety, depression or difficulty handling stress
- ☐ Headaches
- ☐ Behavior that doesn't fit the time, place or people (loud in a library)
- ☐ Poor sleep and feeling tired too easily
- ☐ "Bad" or unwanted behavior
- ☐ Later: Grades dropping, falling behind other kids

NOTE:

Every brain injury is different. There is no set time that recovery takes. If your child is zero to five years old, ask for the "zero to five" parent guide.

FREE RESOURCES

Tennessee Traumatic Brain Injury Program
https://www.tn.gov/health/braininjury.html
1-800-882-0611

Tennessee Youth Sports League Safe Stars Initiative
https://www.tn.gov/health/safestars.html

KidCentral
https://www.kidcentraltn.com

Center on Brain Injury Research and Training
https://cbirt.org/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
https://www.cdc.gov/heads-up/index.html

Family Voices of Tennessee
https://familyvoicestn.org

Brain Links

https://www.tndisability.org/brain

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