

Returning to the Classroom

When to return to the classroom and what to expect following a brain injury vary widely from student to student. There are many return to learn models with common features that include:

1. Interdisciplinary school team
2. Communication between medical and school professionals
3. Clear protocol for academic re-entry, with ongoing monitoring
4. Concussion education for all stakeholders
5. Flexible set of intervention strategies

One very important feature that can contribute to student success is the concussion management team. The role of this team is to coordinate student supports following concussion. It can be a new or existing team within the school that is comprised of school administration, family members, athletic coaches/trainers, educators, and medical providers. Together this team is responsible to coordinate support services by identifying academic, physical and emotional accommodations and then overseeing implementation of the accommodations. The team monitors student progress and revised the plan and accommodations as needed.

Communication between medical and school professionals is very important. However there is no systematic method for connecting children and their families with services within the school and community following TBI. Communication between medical and school professionals allows for coordinated support and monitoring of progress. To be most effective it is helpful to have clear communication between one person in the medical setting and one person in the school setting. That way the school point person is able to interface effectively with the concussion management team.

Having a clear protocol for academic re-entry must include ongoing monitoring that takes into account the student's level of need and where he/she is in the return to learn progression. In step 1 following a brain injury a student needs full cognitive and physical rest. Step 2 will include light cognitive activities. Step 3 allows students to attend partial days at school with school-based accommodations. In step 4, the student returns to full school days with accommodations in place. In step 5, the student returns to full school days with no accommodations in place (the return to physical activity protocol can begin at this time).

Not all students will follow these steps in the same period of time, and depending on the severity of the injury may need accommodations for varying periods as well. It is important to recognize that students recover at different paces and may not always recover to the same level of functioning they had before the injury. They may even show variability in function from day to day or from hour to hour.