

## 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, and common features 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 important feature that can contribute to student success is a concussion management team that works to coordinate student supports following concussion. Teams can be standing or ad hoc, but they should contain school administrators, family members, athletic coaches/trainers, educators, and medical providers. Together, the team coordinates support services by identifying needed academic, physical, and emotional accommodations and then overseeing their implementation. The team monitors student progress and revises the plan and accommodations as needed.

Communication between medical and school professionals is vitally important because children and their families have no systematic way to connect with school and community services following TBI. Communication between medical and school professionals allows them to coordinate support and progress monitoring. To be most effective, clear communication should be set up between one person in the medical setting and one person in the school setting. The school point person can then interface effectively with the concussion management team.

A clear protocol for academic re-entry must include ongoing monitoring of the student's needs and where s/he is in the return-to-learn progression. Immediately following a brain injury (step 1), a student needs total rest. Step 2 involves light mental activity. Step 3 allows students to attend part-time school with maximum school-based accommodations. In step 4, the student attends part-time school with moderate accommodations. In step 5, the student returns to full school days with minimal accommodations. In step 6, the student returns to full-time school with no accommodations. The return to physical activity protocol can begin only at this time.

Students will follow these steps in different amounts of time, depending on the severity of the injury. Accommodations will thus be needed for varying periods. It is important to recognize that students recover at different paces and might not recover to the same level of functioning they had before the injury. Students can also show variability in function from day to day or even hour to hour.