



School Services

School Guide for Students with Traumatic Brain Injury

What is Traumatic Brain Injury?

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is a head injury that occurs when the brain is violently hit by an object. There are two types of brain injuries, closed brain injury and penetrating brain injury.

1. Close brain injury happens when an object hits the head but does not break or penetrates the skull. Closed brain injuries are commonly categorized as mild to moderate form of TBI. These injuries can be the result of motor vehicle crashes, bicycles and pedestrian accidents, sport related injuries, falls, and repeated blows to the head that may occur with child abuse.
2. A penetrating brain injury occurs when an object breaks the skull and pierces the brain such as in gunshot wound to the head. This type of injury is the most severe type of TBI that may result in long term medical and rehabilitative treatments.

Treatment of Traumatic Brain Injury:

Treatment for TBI may differ depending on the type of injury to the brain. Imaging tests such as x-rays, computed tomography (CT scan), and magnetic resonance (MRI) may be necessary to determine course of treatment. Rehabilitation services such as physical, occupational, and speech-language therapies may be recommended along with cognitive rehabilitation and social, emotional, behavioral, and psychiatric support.

How Can Traumatic Brain Injury Affect School Performance?

Children with TBI are at risk for higher levels of academic and behavioral difficulties throughout their school years. Although the symptoms of TBI may vary with each child, it is important for parents to discuss the following changes with the child's physician and school personnel. Children with TBI may struggle with:

- Vision and hearing difficulties
- Attention/Concentration/organization difficulties
- Processing Speed- it may take longer for the student to process information
- Cognitive impairment such as confusion, deficits in short-term or long-term memory, impaired judgment
- Problems with reading, writing, and working with numbers
- Difficulties with speech – such as putting thoughts into words and sentences; slow, hesitant speech and decreased vocabulary
- Difficulties with abstract concepts
- Cognitive fatigue – focusing and thinking for long periods of time may require more effort than it did before the injury
- Difficulties with large motor skills - struggling to run, jump, skip, etc.
- Difficulties with fine motor skills - struggling to write, type, or hold objects
- Behavioral issues - anxiety, frustration, aggression, depression, avoidance, impulsivity
- Difficulties with social situations - isolation from peers and social settings such as not being able to participate in school sporting events/dances, etc.
- Difficulties in making and keeping friends
- Emotional implications such as: low self-esteem; poor motivation; lower interest in school subjects; anxiety, depression, irritability, or fear (before, during and after treatment)
- impaired ability with activities of daily living (ADLs), such as dressing, bathing, toileting, and eating
- Inability to drive a car

How can Schools Assist Students with Traumatic Brain Injury?

Academic

- Initiation of Section 504 or IDEA-Special Education testing for Traumatic Brain injury or Other Health impairments
- Allow extra time to complete assignments/projects/exams
- Assign a moderate workload that emphasizes quality vs. quantity
- Provide the student with an organizational checklist for routine activities, materials needed and steps to follow, this will assist with planning and structure of the school day to help with short term memory and organization
- In grading work, reduce emphasis on spelling and grammatical errors unless it is the purpose of the assignment
- Allow student to use a dictionary or thesaurus for assignment
- Allow student to use a calculator
- Provide instruction targeting more than one learning style to assist with memory problems
- Use repetition and direct instruction to help with focus and attention
- Provide recorded information, highlighted texts, copy of notes
- Practice with recall skills
- Provide preferential seating to optimize concentration and lessen distractions
- Provide assistive technology such as an iPad or word processor for writing assignments
- Excuse tardiness and absence due to medical appointments
- Waive missed assignments from prolonged hospitalizations whenever possible to reduce backlog of missed work

Social/ Emotion

- Provide opportunities for success to elevate low self-esteem
- Reduce emphasis on competition; competitive activities may cause undue stress, leading to simple mistakes - repetitive failure could lead to avoidance of situations, assignments, or responsibilities
- Provide targeted instruction in social skills and reading nonverbal cues
- Provide counseling to address psychological or social effects of condition
- Behavior intervention plans can be helpful for students with behavioral concerns
- School nurse or hospital personnel can share age-appropriate information regarding TBI with peers with parental consent

Physical

- Provide PT/OT/ST evaluations and services if needed Inform teachers and staff of student's specific needs and condition
- Adjust activities to the child's tolerance, allow child to set own limits and closely monitor child for signs of fatigue and distress

Resources

<https://www.kidshealth.org>
<https://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury>
National Library of Medicine
<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org>
<https://www.brainandlife.org/>

School Services Department

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