

SUPPORTING A CHILD/ADOLESCENT WITH CONCUSSION:

Your role as a parent

Helping children and adolescents with their concussion care and returning to school, play, sport and daily life activities requires the support of many. As a parent, you have an important role to play! If your child/adolescent has never had a concussion, use this information to build your knowledge. For parents whose child/adolescent has had a concussion, use this information to advocate for the care and support your child/adolescent may need.

About this resource: The information in this resource is based on the [Living Guideline for Diagnosing and Managing Pediatric Concussion](#). Parent experience in concussion informed the development of this resource, which involved reviewing and selecting recommendations from this Guideline that families should be aware of.



EDUCATION: Know about concussion

- A concussion is a brain injury caused by sudden shaking of the head. Any hit to the head, face, neck or body can cause a concussion. Concussions can happen from a fall, during a motor vehicle collision or sports, or during play at school, camp or in the neighbourhood.
- If the child/adolescent has a significant impact to the head, face, neck, or body and reports any symptoms or shows any of the visual signs of a concussion, you should suspect a concussion.

✓ Take action: Know the school and sports organization's role in concussion!

Enquire if your child/adolescent's school or sports organization has a concussion policy/protocol and refer to it. Determine if:

- concussion education is provided
- staff are oriented to the policies/protocols
- policies/protocols are reviewed and updated regularly

If the school or sports organization does not have a concussion policy/protocol, talk to the administration about putting one in place.

Concussion symptoms: Symptoms describe how someone feels after they are injured. Some symptoms may not appear until the next day. Common concussion symptoms your child/adolescent may experience are:

- Headaches or head pressure
- Easily upset or angered
- Feeling slow, tired or having no energy
- Blurred or fuzzy vision
- Feeling more emotional
- Difficulty working on a computer
- Dizziness
- Nervous or anxious
- Not thinking clearly
- Sensitivity to light or sound
- Sadness
- Difficulty reading or remembering
- Nausea and vomiting
- Sleeping more or less
- Having a hard time falling asleep
- Balance problems

Concussion signs: Signs describe how a child/adolescent looks or acts when they are injured. Common concussion signs your child/adolescent may show are:

- Lying still on the ground or ice
- Slow to get up
- Confusion or can't answer questions
- Blank stare
- Difficulty standing or walking
- Injury to the face or holding their head

✓ Take action:

If anyone (e.g. school teacher, coach) suspects that your child/adolescent has a concussion, take your child/adolescent to a physician or nurse practitioner right away to confirm the diagnosis of concussion. Ask them for information on:

- strategies to promote concussion recovery
- length of concussion recovery
- steps to take to return-to-school, sport and play
- communicating concussion recovery needs and required supports to the school and/or coach (e.g. letter)

It is important that your child/adolescent's healthcare team (e.g. physician) uses the guideline to inform concussion care. Ask if they are aware of the guideline. Refer them to: www.braininjuryguidelines.org.



CONCUSSION RECOVERY: Understand the steps involved

- **Rest for the first 1-2 days after a concussion is key!**
- After this short rest, your child/adolescent should start activities (physical and thinking) that **do not**:
 - make symptoms worse
 - bring on new symptoms
 - increase the risk of a fall or hit to the head or body that could cause another concussion
 - increase the risk for another concussion (e.g. contact sport, full game play)

✓ Take action:

Every child/adolescent's experience with concussion is **different**. If you're not sure what your child/adolescent can do during the recovery process, ask the medical doctor or nurse practitioner. Things you may want to ask about are:

- Importance of sleep
- Driving safety
- Maintaining social interactions
- Avoidance of alcohol and recreational drugs
- Use of computers, phones and screen devices, and if these make symptoms worse
- Use of over-the-counter medications for headaches

Returning to school and sport

- Teachers and coaches can play an active role in supporting your child/adolescent with a concussion to make a *gradual and individualized* (step-by-step) return-to-school and sport. Here are the different steps that you and your child/adolescent can follow:

Steps to return-to-school and sport can happen at the same time. It is important for your child/adolescent to return-to-school full-time at a full academic load (i.e. writing exams without accommodations in place as a result of the concussion) **before** completely returning to full-contact sport, high-risk activities, or work.



Return-to-School Steps:

Steps*	Activity	Example
1	Activities at home that do not make the child/adolescent feel worse	Reading, texting, screen time and other activities that do not make symptoms worse Start at 5-15 minutes at a time
2	School activities	Homework, reading or other activities outside of the classroom
3	Return-to-school part-time	Getting back to school for a few hours or half days
4	Return-to-school full-time	Gradual return to full days at school

Return-to-Activity/Sport/Play Steps:

Steps*	Activity	Example
1	Physical and cognitive activities that do not make the child/adolescent feel worse	Walking at home or in school
2	Light physical activity	Jogging or stationary cycling at slow to medium speed. No weight training
3	Sport-specific exercise	Running or skating drills. No drills with risk of head injury
4	Non-contact activities	Practice without body contact. Gym class activities without risk of head injury
5	Full-contact activities	Full activities/sports practices after doing full-time school and getting a medical doctor's note that states the child/adolescent is cleared to return to full-contact sport or high-risk activity
6	Return to all activities and sports	Normal full-contact game play

* Your child/adolescent can start these steps 1-2 days after a concussion, even with symptoms. Each step should take about one day. If symptoms get worse, the child/adolescent should go back to the last step. Try it again until the child/adolescent can do it without bringing on new symptoms or making symptoms worse. It is important to receive a note from the medical doctor or nurse practitioner that states the child/adolescent is cleared to return to full-contact sport or high-risk activity.

✓ Take action:

Work with your child/adolescent's teacher and school to help put these steps into practice. Your child/adolescent's healthcare provider can advise on what supports might be needed in the classroom to help with return-to-school such as:

- Environment supports (e.g. alternate workspace, reducing noise, rest breaks)
- Instruction supports (e.g. extra help, alternatives for screen-based instruction)
- Assessment and Evaluation supports (e.g. extra time for tests, quiet workspace for test taking)





STAY CONNECTED: Communicate with your child/adolescent, their teacher, coach and healthcare provider

- Returning to sport too soon after a concussion can lead to another injury, resulting in worse symptoms that last longer or a more severe brain injury.
- If you notice that your child/adolescent is developing new concussion-like symptoms or sustains a new suspected concussion, take them to a medical doctor or nurse practitioner.
- Having ongoing conversations about concussion symptoms, medical management and recovery are important so that you can best support your child/adolescent through the concussion recovery process.
- Concussion recovery takes time, so it is important to have patience with your child/adolescent during this process.



Looking for resources?

Here are examples of resources that might be helpful and that you can share with other parents or your child/adolescent's teacher or coach:

- [Concussion Recognition Tool 5: To help identify concussion in children, adolescents, and adults](#)
- [Parachute Concussion Guidelines for Parents & Caregivers](#)
- [Concussion Ed – Parachute Concussion Education](#)
- [PAR Concussion Recognition & Response : Concussion symptom recognition tool for coaches and parents](#)
- [CATT: Concussion Resources for Parents or Caregivers](#)