

Sarah's Story:



Concussions can affect kids and teens in the classroom

As an A-student and star soccer player, Sarah is accustomed to hard work. However, after she sustained a concussion during a varsity soccer game, her freshman year in high school she found herself taking on a new challenge.

"For me, recovering from the concussion was harder than recovering from other injuries I've had. When I got a concussion, I expected to sit out some games, but I never realized that it would actually hurt to think."

While most athletes with a concussion recover quickly and fully, some athletes will have symptoms that last for days, weeks, or even months. These symptoms may not only affect an athlete on the sports field, but also in the classroom.

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury—or TBI—caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or by a hit to the body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. This sudden movement can literally cause the brain to bounce around or twist in the skull, stretching and damaging the brain cells and creating chemical changes in the brain.

After a concussion, rest is critical to help the brain heal. During this time, not only physical activities, but also activities that involve learning and concentration, which are common in the classroom, can cause concussion symptoms (such as an inability to pay attention or learn new information, fatigue, or headaches) to reappear or get worse.

"For nearly two months, I needed frequent breaks to make it through the school day. I would also go to the school clinic and rest when I was overcome by headaches from the lights and noise of the classroom."

Supporting a student recovering from a concussion requires a collaborative approach among school and health care professionals, parents, and students. Fortunately, for Sarah, constant communication between her doctor, parents, and school professionals, as well as careful management of her injury, helped aid her transition back to school.



Sarah's parents shared her doctor's instructions using CDC's ACE Care Plan with her counselors and teachers. Because her concussion symptoms continued for months, her doctor's instructions were ultimately incorporated into a temporary 504 plan.

"My concussion didn't just sideline me from sports; it also sidelined me from school. Before my injury, I was taking advanced classes. Immediately afterward, I couldn't even do simple math problems in my head and couldn't keep up with the lessons. Without extra support, my injury could have had a significant negative impact on my academic record."

By taking the appropriate time to recover and putting the right plans in place, Sarah made a full recovery after 4 months and continues to be successful both in school and on the sports field.

Sarah wants everyone to know that concussions can affect kids and teens in the classroom and that athletes returning to school after a concussion may need to:

- Take rest breaks as needed,
- Spend fewer hours at school,
- Be given more time to take tests or complete assignments,
- Receive help with schoolwork, and/or
- Spend less time on the computer, reading, or writing.

As a student's symptoms decrease, the extra help or support can be gradually removed.

"I encourage all school professionals and parents to learn more about concussion symptoms and the accommodations that can be made to help students recover and return to score in the classroom, as well as on the athletic field."

Section 504 Plans may be implemented when students have a disability (temporary or permanent) that affects their performance in any manner. Services and accommodations for students may include speech-language therapy, environmental adaptations, curriculum modifications, and behavioral strategies.