Returning to School after Traumatic Brain Injury

An adolescent survivor’s guide to thriving in the classroom

Take Ownership.

“We acquire the strength we have overcome.”
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Your healthcare team, teachers, and parents/guardians all want to help you reach your goals. Their support will be a valuable resource as you transition back to school.

But it’s your brain, your education, your life - don’t take the backseat while someone else drives.

You are in an important position to take charge of your learning and set yourself on the path to achieving your dreams.

As you experiment with the strategies listed in this brochure, remember: you are not your TBI. Don’t compare yourself to who you were before your injury - you may need to do things differently.

There’s more than one road to success.

Additional Resources

Learn how other TBI survivors feel about their experiences:
http://www.brainline.org/content/multimedia.php?id=901
http://www.brainline.org/content/2011/07/lost-found-what-brain-injury-survivors-want-you-to-know.html
http://www.cdc.gov/headsup/resources/stories.html

This site for teens includes information on concussions, as well as safety tips for various sports and activities:

This page contains links to resources for children and adolescents living with brain injury:
http://brainstreams.ca/find/kids-and-teens-resources

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This document contains only general strategies and is not intended to replace the guidance of licensed medical professionals and educators. Please defer to this team as they know you the best.
Strategies designed with you in mind

Survivors may take the following steps to facilitate function in these areas of cognition that are commonly affected by brain injury.

**Attention**

Be proactive in planning your schedule. For example, let your teachers and parents know if you concentrate better in the morning or in the afternoon and if five-minute breaks help you re-focus. If something feels like too much too soon, speak up so that adjustments can be made. Similarly, as you recover, don’t be afraid to ask for your schedule to be re-evaluated.

Remove yourself from distractions. At home, find a quiet place to study and ask family members not to disturb you. Shut off electronics. At school, try to sit near the front of the classroom and find a “study buddy” who is willing to share notes and clarify directions. You may also request a separate, quiet testing location.

Steer clear of multitasking. Focus on one assignment at a time. Ask a teacher to help you break down intimidating tasks, such as essays or long problem sets, into manageable segments. Do a little bit each night, rather than cramming the night before work is due.

**Memory**

Stick to a daily routine. If you do something at the same time every day, you will be much less likely to forget it. Make changes in your routine gradually, and, if you need to remember a special event or assignment, write it down on a calendar and ask someone you trust to remind you.

Review as much as possible. Don’t wait until the night before a test to start studying. Read over your notes each day and ask a friend or family member to quiz you on what you’ve learned. Develop and practice mnemonic devices (such as FACE for the spaces in a musical measure).

**Problem Solving**

When it doubt, write it out. Each day, write down what needs to be done, and cross off tasks as you complete them. If you’re having trouble with a decision, make a pro-con chart, and talk through the possible outcomes with a trusted friend or family member.

Reward yourself. Have a treat on you and, each time you complete a problem, allow yourself some! Once you’ve finished your assignments or made it through an entire school day, treat yourself to a favorite activity. Remain positive about your progress.

Listen to your body. It is important to know your limits: doing something before you’re ready may be harmful. If you try lengthening the day and feel overwhelmed or fatigued, tell your parents and teachers. If you try a new activity (such as returning to a sport) and feel “off” afterwards, let your parents and coaches know. But, if you think you’re ready for something, talk about that with your parents and teachers too!

Materials are your friend. Invest in a planner, sticky notes, whatever will help jog your memory. Ask your teachers if they’ll allow tape recorders during class - this way, you can go back later and listen to anything you may have forgotten or missed. You may also want to ask for formula sheets or access to your notes during tests.