



BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY

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Helpline: 1-800-669-4323

No Brain Injury is
Too Mild to Ignore,
or Too Severe to
Lose Hope

School Accommodations for Students with Brain Injury

By Donna Bogart, Malia Corde, Lois Mishkin, and Susan Paradise

Each family and child affected by brain injury is unique, but all face the same confusion and questions that arise when it is time for their child to return to school. The following information is offered as a way to help you better navigate your child's return to school.

Assessments for Students with Brain Injury

There are many valuable types of assessments and evaluations that can be useful when your child returns to school. Your district's child study team can conduct assessments to determine your child's strengths and weaknesses in academic, developmental, and functional areas. There are other tests that examine cognitive abilities. Neuropsychological evaluations are the primary method for assessing cognitive abilities after a brain injury. It differs from standard psychological evaluations your child's school may conduct in the degree to which each area is assessed.

A neuropsychological evaluation is a comprehensive assessment of your child's thinking skills (cognition), behavior, and emotional status. This evaluation gives information on how your child is learning and identifies your child's strengths and weaknesses. The results give information that is critical for developing an effective educational program. A neuropsychologist is a doctorate-level psychologist with extensive training and experience in brain-behavior relationships. When choosing a neuropsychologist, it is important to find one who has experience with children and brain injury. Most school systems do not have a neuropsychologist on staff; however, school systems are required to provide all necessary services to promote your child's learning. As a parent, you have the right to ask for a neuropsychological evaluation.

Consequences of Brain Injury

Students with brain injury are unique in many ways. Whether your child is eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and/or Section 504, there are consequences of brain injury that need to be considered. Cognitive deficits are very common after a brain injury and have profound effects on a student's learning. The following are some examples of cognitive deficits and how they present in the classroom:

- Attention deficits – unable to tune out distractions, such as nearby conversations
- Communication deficits – comprehending class discussion and/or what has been read, or being able to find specific words on demand



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- Rate of processing – keeping up with the flow of information discussed when topics change
- Organizational deficits – deciding which step goes first, second, etc.
- Memory – short term recall and planning ahead
- Reasoning/abstract thinking – “why” and “how” questions compared to “where” or “when” questions, generalizing concepts compared to recalling concrete details
- Problem solving – finding solutions to problems such as a lost pencil
- Simultaneous processing- listening to a lecture and taking notes at the same time
- Executive functioning – inhibiting inappropriate behavior, self-monitoring and reviewing work for errors
- Cognitive rigidity – “getting stuck” in one mode of thought or thinking

A student with a brain injury can also have psychosocial difficulties for many reasons, which could include difficulty following conversations, making inappropriate comments, not picking up on social cues, etc. Also, the full impact of a student’s brain injury may not become evident until middle school or high school as the curriculum becomes more challenging. While this may be a time when students prefer “less stigma”, there are supports in addition to those provided in the general education classroom that are appropriate for older students. Often study hall can be replaced, through an IEP, with study skills, social skills and supplemental instruction.

Accommodations for Students with Brain Injury

Many types of accommodations can be provided to assist your child once he/she returns to school. Accommodations are adjustments to the instruction, assessment, materials, equipment, or physical environment to make sure your child has equal access to curriculum and a way to be successful. The nature of these accommodations will vary depending upon the severity of your child’s cognitive deficits, age, and how he/she functioned prior to the injury. The following is a sample of accommodations that may be provided under IDEA or Section 504.

Physical Arrangement of Room:

- Preferential seating to optimize attention and concentration
- Avoiding distracting stimuli (air conditioner, high traffic area)
- Increasing distance between desks

Lesson Presentation:

- Providing a written outline prior to the outline so the student can follow along and make notes accordingly
- Subtly repeating directions to the student after they have been given to the class
- Using computer-assisted instruction



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- Providing visual aids, large print
- Breaking longer presentations into shorter segments

Assignments/Worksheets:

- Giving extra time to complete tasks
- Simplifying complex directions
- Shortening assignments, breaking work into smaller segments
- Allowing students to tape record assignments/homework

Test Taking:

- Giving tests orally
- Allowing student to dictate responses
- Allowing extra time for tests
- Providing a quiet setting for test taking
- Having directions read, repeated or re-worded
- Providing study guides as far in advance of quizzes and tests as possible
- Providing word banks

Assistive Technology:

- Highlighting pen/tape
- Slant board
- Personal dry erase board
- Tape recorder with head phones
- Calculator with large print display and/or large keypad
- Portable word processor with built-in spellchecker
- Electronic dictionary/thesaurus

Conclusion

Return to school for families and children affected by brain injury can be difficult and confusing, but the more informed families are the more comfortable they will feel as their children transition back to school. Always remember that you know your child best, and you can provide the school system with vital information to ensure that your child's return to school is successful.

The Brain Injury Association of New Jersey maintains a Brain Injury Resource Center that includes books, videos, and articles that focus on return to school following a brain injury. For more information, contact an Association Helpline Specialist at 1-800-669-4323 or info@bianj.org.

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