My student has a Traumatic Brain Injury

What do I need to do?

This educational segment was developed and presented by professionals at the Kennedy Krieger Institute and the Brain Injury Association of Maryland for the Maryland State Department of Education.

Return to School Following a Moderate/Severe Traumatic Brain Injury

This module will describe the role of a teacher and the steps needed to be done to initiate services for a student with a traumatic brain injury.
To understand more about neuro-anatomy of the brain, please take time to review the first four modules in this program:

- Traumatic Brain Injury: Basic Neuroanatomy
- Brain Injury 101
- Outcomes after Brain Injury: What to expect
- mTBI: Common Myths and Facts

What is the first thing I should do?

Panic
Do nothing. It’s not my job to get involved.
Contact the Student Services Team at my school.

A student’s parent just told me that he has sustained a traumatic brain injury!

If your student had a TBI, there are many things you can do to help!

What is the first thing I should do?

Panic
Do nothing. It’s not my job to get involved.
Contact the Student Services Team at my school.

While it can be alarming to hear that your student has a traumatic brain injury, it’s important to think about the things you can do to help.

Make sure that your Student Services Team knows about the injury.
Help gather documentation and assignments for your student.
Do nothing
It may be overwhelming to think about, but students with traumatic brain injury need to be evaluated in the school... and quickly!
It’s important to expedite referrals and any evaluations for students with TBI since they often need services and their needs can change very quickly!

That’s right! Contacting the Student Services Team is the right thing to do. They will be able to access medical records and determine whether additional information is needed.

The Student Services Team
The Student Services Team should obtain a Release of Information signed by the parent to request medical records from the hospital or rehabilitation facilities where the student was admitted.
What Reports Might Be Helpful?

- Medical
- Neuropsychological
- Educational
- Speech and Language
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Hearing
- Vision
- Assistive Technology

What is a medical evaluation?

A medical evaluation can provide me with information about the type of injury of the student. It can also provide medical concerns, restrictions and needs of the student that will help in planning his return to school.

Possible areas of concern:
- seizures
- statistics/Home and Hospital
- diet
- medication management
- vision/hearing
- respiratory management
- physical/sports restriction

Click here to return to reports
What is a neuropsychological evaluation?

A neuropsychological evaluation is an in-depth assessment of skills and abilities that are linked to brain function. The evaluation will measure the following areas of brain function:

• Adaptive skills
• Attention and memory
• Social-emotional functioning
• Problem-solving
• Language
• Processing
• Intellectual skills
• Visual-spatial skills

Neuropsychological vs. school psychological assessment?

A school-based psychological assessment typically evaluates intellectual and behavioral functioning; whereas a neuropsychological evaluation in addition to the above, incorporates brain-behavior relationships. Such an evaluation will help the staff understand the student’s functioning in the context of brain functioning.

What is an educational evaluation?

An educational evaluation assesses areas of current academic functioning including reading, math, written language and listening comprehension skills.
What will an educational evaluation tell me for a student with a brain injury?

- Current level of functioning which may just reflect pre-learning knowledge, not new learning ability
- Variability of current strengths and areas of weaknesses
- Look for patterns
- What is cognitive impact vs. actual knowledge

Speech and Language

What is a speech/language evaluation?
A speech language evaluation for a student with a TBI should address the following areas:

- Receptive Language
- Expressive Language
- Pragmatic Language
- Swallowing Skills
- Breath support, speech
- Communication

What will a speech/language evaluation tell me for a student with TBI?

- How does the student understand language?
- How can the student communicate (verbally, ACC, rate, speed)?
- How does speech and language impact social language skills?
- How do oral and motor skills impact eating/drinking?
An occupational therapy evaluation for a student with a brain injury should assess the following areas:

- Fine Motor Skills
- Visual Perceptual Skills
- Visual-Motor Skills
- Activities of Daily Living Skills

What will an occupational therapy evaluation tell me for a student with a brain injury?

- What level of writing can the student do and what may impact written expression?
- What level of fine motor functioning may impact it?
- What level of independence for ADLs?
- Does the student require equipment?
- Does the material need to be modified or presented in a certain way visually?

A physical therapy evaluation for a student with a brain injury should assess the following areas:

- Endurance
- Speed
- Balance
- Coordination
- Mobility
- Motor Planning
- Equipment
What will a physical therapy evaluation tell me for a student with TBI?

- What type of mobility does the student access?
- What is the student’s physical stamina?
- What degree of assistance or supervision is required for mobility?
- Are there physical restrictions for recess and PE?
- How does cognition impact mobility?

What is an audiological evaluation?
An audiological assessment can provide me with information regarding the student’s hearing. An audiologist will use a variety of tools to measure the peripheral and central auditory systems.

Possible areas of concern:
- Tinnitus (ringing in the ear)
- Vestibular issues (dizziness and balance)
- Sound sensitivity
- Auditory processing disorder
- Hearing loss
Vision - What is a vision assessment?

A neuro-ophthalmology evaluation assesses the visual system as it relates to the nervous system. This includes vision disorders due to injury to the brain, the optic nerves, or the visual pathways which transmit visual signals from the eyes to the brain.

A functional vision assessment assesses how the student uses his vision in functional settings, such as the classroom and will tell me how to present information to the student.

What will a neuro-ophthalmology evaluation tell me for a student with TBI?

Diagnoses that may present following TBI:
• Cortical visual impairment
• Esotropia
• Diplopia
• Convergence insufficiency
• Visual Field cut

What will a functional vision assessment tell me for a student with a brain injury?

• How does the student’s vision impact education?
• What materials and instructional adaptations are needed?
• How does the eye/cortical condition translate to functional tasks?
• What environmental adaptations may be needed?
Assistive Technology

What is an assistive technology evaluation?

An assistive technology evaluation is completed by an assistive technologist or sometimes by a team of specialists to determine what technology will help improve the student’s performance, participation and independence.

What will an AT assessment tell me for someone following brain injury?

What technology can help my student with a TBI? Technology can compensate for deficits in the following areas:

- Motor
- Cognitive
- Communication

Key take away points to remember as we embark on the special education timeline.

- Provide frequent monitoring of goals and ensure progress is being made.
- Initially, have quarterly team meetings to ensure services are appropriate.
- Keep in mind process, not only content, and develop IEP goals as needed in these areas.
- Keep in mind behaviors that may interfere with learning, even if not aggressive (attention, impulse control, following directions, decreased frustration tolerance, etc.) and develop goals in these areas.