

To combat misconceptions and help parents prepare, we have created a checklist of what to expect when your child gets a concussion. This checklist aligns with the [CDC guidelines](#) and [Canada's Parachute guidelines](#) to ensure that you take the appropriate steps to mitigate risk and maximize your child's recovery.

STEP 1: REMOVE YOUR CHILD FROM PLAY

The following are signs that parents can look for when they suspect their child may have sustained a head injury:

- Confusion
- Clumsy movement
- Lethargy
- Mood or behavior changes
- Loss of memory

The CDC recommends: "When in doubt, sit them out." In other words, if you suspect your child has suffered a concussion, err on the side of caution and remove them from play.

Do not return your child to play until they have been provided clearance by a qualified healthcare professional specializing in concussion management or knows your child (i.e., primary care provider).

STEP 2: HAVE YOUR CHILD EVALUATED BY A QUALIFIED HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

If an athletic trainer is available onsite, have them evaluate your child as soon as possible. The athletic trainer will also be able to help with referrals.

Ideally, it would be best to have your child seen by a healthcare professional specializing in concussion management (i.e., athletic trainer or sports medicine physician).

Have the following information available to provide to the healthcare professional:

- How the injury happened
- Symptoms that your child has experienced since the initial injury
- Abnormal complaints, behaviors, or mood changes
- Physical signs, such as balance or coordination issues

STEP 3: SEEK EMERGENT CARE IF YOUR CHILD'S SYMPTOMS WORSEN

The following signs and symptoms may indicate bleeding on the brain or more serious injury. Seek emergent care if one or more of the following are present:

- Slurred speech, weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination
- Excessive vomiting or nausea
- Drowsiness or inability to wake up
- Convulsions or seizures
- Unusual and growing behavior, confusion, restlessness, or agitation
- Loss of consciousness (knocked out)
- Neck pain

STEP 4: FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS FROM THE HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS THAT EVALUATED YOUR CHILD

These directions may include:

- Ensuring your child is resting
- Monitoring their signs and symptoms daily
- Modifying school work and physical activity
- Monitoring and minimizing screen time

STEP 5: REFER TO ADDITIONAL SPECIALIZED HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS, IF NEEDED

Based on the severity of your child's concussion, you may be referred to more specialized care, such as:

- Sports medicine physicians or practitioners to provide sport-related guidance, and ultimately, medical clearance
- Neurologist to evaluate and treat neurological symptoms or when recovery is taking longer than anticipated
- Physical therapist to help your child restore symptom-free balance, coordination, and physical activity

STEP 6: ALLOW TIME FOR YOUR CHILD TO RECOVER

Concussion recovery takes patience.

Each concussion is unique. Recovery usually takes 1-4 weeks. If recovery takes longer than one month, your child may be referred for specialized care.

Remember that your child's brain is still developing, so allowing adequate time for recovery is crucial. Returning to sport too soon can severely delay recovery and increase the chances of sustaining another concussion.

The most important thing to do for your child is to allow them to rest.

Create an environment that optimizes recovery—for example, a dark room with no TV, loud noises, or flashing lights.

Speak with the school nurse and administrators to make accommodations in school and homework, if needed. (You may need a "doctor's note." Your athletic trainer or physician should be able to help with this.)

STEP 7: HAVE YOUR CHILD RE-EVALUATED BY A QUALIFIED HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL WHO CAN MAKE RETURN-TO-PLAY DECISIONS

Please do not allow your child to return to sport until they have received medical clearance.

In most cases, the professional who can provide medical clearance will be your child's physician, but this can vary from state to state in the U.S. Be sure to check your local state guidelines for who can and cannot provide medical clearance.

Ask your healthcare provider about prescribing your child a gradual return-to-play protocol.

STEP 8: HAVE YOUR CHILD PARTICIPATE IN A GRADUAL RETURN-TO-PLAY PROTOCOL

Most return-to-play protocols involve a 6- or 7-step progression, with each step lasting a minimum of 24 hours. Your child must pass each step of the progression symptom-free to proceed to the next step.

These progressions include:

- Returning to school and sedentary activities
- Gradual return to physical activity (light to moderate to intense physical activity)
- Gradual return to sport (practice and contact training, then full competition)

STEP 9: DECREASE THE RISK OF YOUR CHILD SUSTAINING ANOTHER CONCUSSION

After one concussion, the risk of sustaining another concussion increases.

Make sure your child's helmet and equipment fit properly. Do not "size-up."

Have your child's coach observe your child during play to make sure they're using proper form. (For example, heads up during football tackles.)

Ensure playing conditions are safe (proper mats for stunts, the padding on goalposts, etc.)

In addition to following this checklist, we recommend that you advocate for better concussion care at your child's school. You can advocate two ways by requesting that the school:

- ① Hire at least one full-time **athletic trainer** and
- ② Provide **mandatory concussion education and training to all coaches**

These two items will go a long way in improving the recognition and management of concussions at your child's school.