



## TBI Tips



## Academic Accommodations

The effects of brain injury can make it difficult for students to participate in school at the same level they did before their injuries. Providing simple accommodations for students with mild-moderate challenges following brain injury can increase learning and improve behavior in the classroom by reducing anxiety and stress.

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### OVERVIEW

Brain injury can have a significant impact on academic performance. The combination of the cognitive effects of brain injury and the feelings of loss and frustration can make school very hard. Because these challenges are usually invisible, and because students aren't used to needing supports at school, teachers and students may not recognize that some simple accommodations can make a big difference.

#### **What is an accommodation?**

An accommodation changes how a student learns the material. An accommodation is a device, practice, intervention, or procedure provided to a student with a disability that affords equal access to instruction and assessment. Accommodations do not compromise the learning expectations, construct, grade-level standard or the measured outcome.

#### **What is a modification?**

A modification changes what a student is taught or expected to learn. A modification is also a device, practice, intervention, or procedure provided to a student with a disability that affords equal access to instruction and assessment. However, in the case of a modification, the educator must change the core content standard or performance expectation to achieve appropriate access for the student.

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#### **MATCH THE ACCOMMODATION TO THE CHILD.**

Each student with brain injury faces different challenges, so the accommodations that help them to be more successful at school can vary widely. A student may need cognitive, emotional or physical accommodations.

## HOW?

### *Cognitive Accommodations:*

- Provide class notes by teacher or peer. Allow use of computer, smart phone, or tape recorder.
  - Help the student determine whether written or audio-recorded notes are most helpful. If written notes work best, prepare them ahead of time so your student can follow along during instruction or enlist the help of a peer by making a copy of his notes. If audio notes work best, allow your student to record instruction. You may need to remind him when to turn on/off the recording device. Guided notes, written notes with some words missing which require the student to pay attention and look for the missing words, are also a good idea. The student can follow along, but still be engaged by writing smaller amounts.
- Once the key learning objective has been taught and practiced under teacher supervision, reduce repetition so the student can continue learning without becoming overloaded.
  - Assign the student 5 math problems instead of 30.
- Allow students to demonstrate understanding orally instead of in writing.
  - If you are giving a comprehension test in reading, allow the student to answer orally while you write her answers.
- Allow students opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, not only memory.
  - If student is given a paper/ pencil test, try to avoid open-ended questions. Use multiple choice, word banks, matching, or true/false, so student uses recognition rather than recall to answer the questions.

### *Physical Accommodations*

- Allow for strategic rest breaks.
  - Plan time and place for the student to take 5-10 minute breaks every 30-45 minutes.
- Control for light sensitivity.
  - Allow your student to wear sunglasses or a hat with a brim indoors. Draw blinds or seat the child away from windows.

### *Emotional Accommodations*

- Keep the student engaged in extracurricular activities. This can improve self-confidence and promote positive social interactions. Allow student to attend but not fully participate in sports activities. Find ways for the student to help that are meaningful to her.
  - If your student is interested in swimming, but can't participate in the pool, allow her to time students, run warm-ups or create a swimming schedule.
- Encourage the student to explore alternative activities of non-physical nature.
  - Inform student of school groups or clubs like art, photography or chess.

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## KEEP ACCOMMODATIONS CONSISTENT AND SIMPLE.

If the accommodation you are providing has multiple steps or is used inconsistently across classroom environments, it may actually create more confusion and be ineffective.

### HOW?

- Make sure the accommodation you are giving is simple enough for your student to understand.
  - Accommodation: student can leave the classroom to take a break at his own discretion when needed.
- Be consistent to avoid frustrating or confusing your student.
  - If you give your student extra time on his math assignment, continue to give him extra time until it is no longer needed.
  - If you allow your high school student to use an audio recorder in your class, talk to her other teachers and ask them to also allow her to use the recorder in their classes.
- Monitor accommodations frequently and adjust as needed.
  - If you allow your student to begin her math quiz 5 minutes before the rest of the class, but see over time that she is finishing before the time is up, reduce the amount of time she begins early until she is starting with the rest of the class.

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## BE FLEXIBLE WITH TESTS AND ASSIGNMENTS.

If your student completes an assignment differently than other students, it does not mean that she hasn't demonstrated proficiency with the skill or concept--you have just allowed her to show her proficiency in a different way. Being flexible allows your student to complete the same work with reduced stress.

### HOW?

- Break larger tasks into smaller steps to create small successes along the way.
  - Break a test into manageable sections that you know your student can complete. Put each section on its own piece of paper. This will decrease the likelihood of your student becoming frustrated and overwhelmed.
  - Assign your student ten minutes of reading instead of twenty.
- Establish minimum work requirements and steps for achieving goals in collaboration with the student.
  - Specific time limits, such as "You must complete five problems in 10 minutes" tend to generate oppositional responses. Instead, ask the student, "How many problems do you think you can complete in 10 minutes?" Then re-evaluate this goal and provide positive support.

- Allow for in class assignments and tests to be considered complete when a specified amount of time is up.
  - If the class period ends and your student still has five questions left to complete the test allow them to turn in the test as done. Do not expect them to complete the remaining questions. Do not penalize their grade. Instead, score the items they have finished.
- Reduce homework to just the most important assignments and base grades on adjusted load.
  - Meet with the student to identify 4 of the 8 Social Studies assignments planned for the semester. Help the student develop a plan to get the assignments completed, including checking in weekly and working with a peer tutor. Be sure to write down what the student needs to do and share it with both the student and the parents to avoid confusion.

When modifying assignments or allowing them extra time, it is important for the student (and parent) to have the specifics written down so there is no confusion. Also, assign mini-due dates to assignments so student can manage it better

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## TEACH STUDENTS TO RECOGNIZE WHEN THEY NEED HELP AND TO ASK FOR IT.

It's hard for some students to know when they need help with academics. A student who is used to doing well in school may also feel embarrassed to ask for accommodations.

### HOW?

- Assess how the student is doing, using observation and curriculum based assessments.
  - When a student appears to be struggling, try pointing out to the student what you see and giving the student an alternative activity, a way to solve their problem or a break from the task at hand.
- Teach students phrases that can be used as escape valves (e.g., "I need a break") when they feel pressured.
- Make a plan for help. Include how everyone will know the student needs help and what exactly help will look like.
  - If your student needs help frequently, but does not like to draw attention by raising her hand, teach her to place her pencil at the corner of her desk when she needs help. You and the student will know the signal. Make sure to share the signal with substitute teachers and adult volunteers in the class.

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## INFORM ALL SCHOOL STAFF OF THE STUDENT'S ACCOMMODATIONS.

It is important that the student receives the accommodations he needs in a consistent and timely manner.

### HOW?

- Create an email list so that all educators working with the student are made aware of the accommodations the student needs.
  - When a new accommodation is added for the student, one of the people working with him will send an email to everyone informing them of the change.
- Have a team meeting.
  - Hold a team meeting to talk about the student's needs and the possible accommodations that could help them.
- Consider creating a 504 plan for the student.
  - All schools have a 504 coordinator. Talk to the 504 coordinator, the student's family and the school team about a possible 504 plan for the student.