



Elementary School versus High School

School nurses are often the GATE KEEPERS for students with concussion. They are the first responders when students are injured at school, and the first to typically identify undiagnosed concussions by spotting the RED FLAGS.

In elementary students, it can be difficult to discern concussion related symptoms versus typical age related characteristics. Young students tend to experience limited memory and limited attention spans, which are inherently related to their stage of development. Teachers and parents can offer valuable baseline information regarding what would be considered “typical” performance and behaviors for a student prior to a concussion.

- Elementary school students have greater difficulty introspectively deciphering how they feel and then putting it into words. After concussion, it is common to hear children say they “just do not feel good.”
- The younger elementary age students exhibit behavioral melt downs or act out of character because they simply do not feel well and are mentally and physically fatigued.
- Parents of younger children often report their child “holds it together” during the school day, but once at home, is cognitively and emotionally exhausted, making homework or makeup-work a significantly difficult task.
- Communication between home and school for elementary students is of utmost importance during recovery. Parents hold key information pertaining to symptoms occurring at home, as well as pertinent changes to the students’ sleep cycle.

Debate rages surrounding issues of what long term impacts multiple concussions may have on the developing brain. Also, a child’s brain is not fully developed until the early to mid-twenties. Because of this developmental timespan, it can be theorized that multiple concussions may manifest symptoms at key brain maturation points, such as middle school.

School nurses play a critical role ensuring those earlier brain injuries are documented somewhere in the student’s educational file. In later years, as the brain develops, if there is a need for more intensive academic or behavioral intervention, the school team will have the prior concussion(s) documented in the student’s file.

When asking students in elementary school about their symptoms, symptoms should be described in student friendly, age appropriate language. Typical concussion symptoms can be substituted by child friendly descriptors.

Rather than:

Do you feel foggy?

Do you have a headache?

Do you feel nauseous?

Do you feel irritable?

Say:

Does your head feel spacy?

Does it almost feel like your head is a bobble head?

Does it feel like things around you are moving when they shouldn’t be? Do you feel dizzy?

Does your head feel pressure inside, like it is full?

Does your tummy/stomach hurt?

Are you in a bad mood today?