



# Communicating Effectively about Concussions

INFORMATION FOR COACHES

It's important to raise awareness about concussion throughout the league or school community and to educate athletes, parents, and others about how to prevent, recognize, and respond to concussions. Enlist the help of other coaches and league or school staff, including a certified athletic trainer or school nurse, and pass out the "Heads Up" fact sheets, show the videos, and/or make presentations to each group.

## TALKING TO ATHLETES:

Pass out the "Heads Up" fact sheet for athletes and show the videos on concussion found online at: [www.cdc.gov/Concussion/Resources](http://www.cdc.gov/Concussion/Resources). Emphasize that you take the issue seriously and that you expect them to do so as well. Devote a regular team meeting to this topic and invite the school nurse, certified athletic trainer, or other health care professional to speak to your team. Here are some things you can discuss with your athletes:

- "Every bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body can potentially cause a concussion."
- "Playing injured does not show courage or strength. Do not play through symptoms of concussion. You can increase your chances of having a repeat concussion and more serious long-term problems."
- "Tell coaching staff right away if you receive a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body and have signs and symptoms of concussion or just don't 'feel right.'"
- "Signs and symptoms of concussion can appear right away or may not be noticed for days or weeks after the injury. Tell your coach if you think you have a concussion or if you think a teammate has one."
- "You can get a concussion even if you are not 'knocked out.'"
- "Concussions can happen during drills, practices, and games. Injuries that happen during practice should be taken just as seriously as those that happen during competition."
- "Tell your coach if you have ever had a concussion."
- "If you think you have a concussion, don't hide it, report it. Take time to recover. It's better to miss one game than the whole season."

## TALKING WITH PARENTS:

Send a copy of the concussion policy and action plan to each athlete's family during the preseason, along with the "Heads Up" fact sheet for parents. Parents should sign the concussion policy statement at the beginning of each sports season and be informed that if an athlete has a concussion s/he will be kept out of play until a health care professional, experienced in evaluating for concussion, says the student is symptom-free and it's OK to return to play. Here are some things you can discuss with your athletes' parents:

- "Your child's or teen's safety is our first priority. Every concussion should be taken seriously."
- "Let your child or teen know that it's not smart to play injured. Don't let your child or teen convince you that s/he is 'just fine.'"
- "We know you care about your child's or teen's health. That is why it is so important that you talk with her/him about the potential dangers of concussion and how to prevent it."
- "Learn about and watch for any signs and symptoms of concussion if your child or teen has a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body. Signs and symptoms can appear right away or may not be noticed for days after the injury."
- "Help look for signs of concussion. Carry the list of symptoms and the action plan with you to practices and games."
- "Alert your child's or teen's coach to any known or suspected concussion. To help prevent the possibility of long-term problems, don't let your child or teen return to play until a health care professional, experienced in evaluating for concussion, says s/he is symptom-free and it's OK to return to play."

## TALKING WITH SCHOOL AND LEAGUE STAFF:

Enlist support from and look for opportunities to meet with your certified athletic trainer, school nurse, athletic director, or other school or league staff. Explain your concerns, the seriousness of the issue, and the impact that concussions in sports can have on an athlete, the team, and the league or school. Discuss the league, school or district's concussion policy and action plan and ask for support to implement them. Here are some things you can discuss with league or school staff:

- "A concussion can happen in any sport or recreational activity. All concussions are serious."
- "League and school staff, working as a team with health care professionals and parents, are key to preventing, recognizing, and correctly responding to concussions."
- "Keeping athletes and students safe and healthy helps enhance the reputation of the school and league and provides a positive and supportive environment for kids and teens."
- "A monitoring and communication plan should be established among coaches of different sports, so that an athlete does not go from one sport to another with a concussion."
- "It's ideal to have a health care professional available during athletic activities—both practices and competitions."
- "Coaches of all sports should be encouraged to distribute educational materials about concussion to athletes and parents."

For more information on concussion and to order concussion educational materials for coaches, parents, and athletes, free-of-charge, visit: [www.cdc.gov/Concussion](http://www.cdc.gov/Concussion).