

## **PREVENTION: Minimizing the Risk of Concussions**

Education is the prime factor in supporting the prevention of a concussion. Any time a student/athlete is involved in physical activity there is a chance of sustaining a concussion. Therefore it is important to take a preventative approach when dealing with concussions and to mitigate the severity of the injury.

Prior to any activity, school staff (includes administration staff, teaching staff, support staff, coaches, volunteers, etc.) must meet with participants to provide instruction on strategies for preventing and minimizing the risk of sustaining a concussion and other head injuries. School staff should refer to the sections on Prevention and Concussion Education in the HDSB Concussion Protocol, as well as the Halton District School Board Safety Guidelines relevant to each sport/activity (e.g., Curricular Module 1, Intramural Module 2, and Interschool Module 3).

The prevention strategies have been organized into two main sections according to when they should be implemented:

- *those strategies that should be used prior to physical activity (at the beginning of the school year), physical education class and/or prior to the sport season (e.g., interschool teams, intramural/club activities);*
- *those strategies that should be used during physical activity, physical education class and/or a sport season or intramural/club activities.*

***Prior to physical activity (at the beginning of the school year), physical education class and/or prior to the sport season (e.g., interschool teams, intramural/club activities);***

**a) Teachers/coaches/supervisors should:**

- be knowledgeable of HDSB's concussion policy and procedures for prevention, identification, and management (Return to Learn and Return to Physical Activity);
- document safety lessons and discussions related to the activity as part of lesson plans or coaching notes
- be knowledgeable about safe practices in the sport/activity (e.g., the rules and regulations and the specific sport/activity pages in the HDSB Safety Guidelines);
- be familiar with the risks of a concussion or other potential injuries associated with the activity/sport and how to minimize those risks;
- be up to date with rule changes and protocols associated with minimizing the risks of concussions as enforced by HDSB, the Athletic Associations and Referees
- be up to date with current body contact skills and techniques of the sport/activity (e.g., safe tackling in tackle football), and emphasize the importance of keeping head up and avoiding collisions, when coaching/supervising contact activities;
- be knowledgeable (where applicable) with the requirements for wearing helmets. *Note: To date there is no evidence that helmets protect against concussions.) For more information on helmets please see the Generic Section of HDSB Interschool Safety Guidelines;*

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- determine that protective equipment is approved by a recognized equipment standards association (e.g., CSA, NOCSAE), is well maintained, and is visually inspected prior to activity; and
- determine (where applicable) that protective equipment is inspected within approved timelines, by a certified re-conditioner as required by manufacturer (e.g., football helmet); athletes and parents/guardians must be informed of the importance of determining that the equipment is in good working order and suitable for personal use

**b) Student/athletes should know and understand:**

- definition of a concussion;
- causes of concussions
- signs and symptoms of concussions
- the risks of a concussion associated with the activity/sport and how to minimize those risks
- seriousness of concussions and the dangers of participating in an activity while experiencing the signs and symptoms of a concussion and potential long-term consequences
- the HDSB Concussion Protocol Identification and Management procedures: Tool to Identify a Concussion (C2) and Summary Return to Learn/Return to Physical Activity Plan

**And the importance of:**

- respecting the rules of the game and practising fair play (e.g., to follow the rules and ethics of play, to practice good sportsmanship at all times and to respect their opponents and officials);
- immediately informing the teacher/coach of any signs or symptoms of a concussion, and removing themselves from the activity;
- encouraging a teammate with signs or symptoms to remove themselves from the activity and to inform the teacher/coach;
- informing the teacher/coach when a classmate/teammate has signs or symptoms of a concussion;
- the use of helmet when they are required for a sport/activity,

*Note: Helmets do not prevent concussions. Helmets are designed to protect against and prevent skull fractures, major brain injuries (including bleeding into or around the brain), brain contusions, lacerations and facial injuries;*

- helmets are to be properly fitted and worn correctly (e.g., only one finger should fit between the strap and the chin when strap is done up).

**c) Parents/guardians to be informed of the:**

- definition of a concussion;
- signs and symptoms of a concussion;
- risks and possible mitigations of the activity/sport;
- the HDSB Concussion Protocol Identification and Management procedures: Tool to Identify a Concussion (C2), Documentation of Monitoring/Medical Examination Form (C3) and Return to Learn/Return to Physical Activity Plan (C4)
- dangers of participating with a concussion;
- importance of encouraging the ethical values of fair play and respect for opponents.

*During physical activity, physical education class and/or a sport season or intramural/club activities:*

**a) teachers/coaches /supervisors should:**

- teach skills and techniques in the proper progression;
- document safety lessons and discussions related to the activity as part of lesson plans or coaching notes
- provide activity/sport-specific concussion information when possible;
- teach and enforce the rules and regulations of the sport/activity during practices and games/competition (particularly those that limit or eliminate body contact, or equipment on body contact);
- reinforce the principles of head-injury prevention (e.g., keeping the head up and avoiding collision);
- inform students about the importance of protective equipment fitting correctly (e.g., helmets, padding, guards).
- teach students/athletes involved in body contact activities:
  - sport-specific rules and regulations of body contact (e.g., no hits to the head).
  - body contact skills and techniques and require the successful demonstration of these skills in practice prior to competition.

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- demonstrate and role model the ethical values of fair play and respect for opponents;
- encourage students/athletes to follow the rules of play, and to practice fair play;
- support student athletes recovering from a concussion and only allow return to play when they have received full consent from medical doctor (C4, Step 4).
- discourage others from pressuring injured students/athletes to play/participate;
- use game/match officials in higher-risk interschool sports that are knowledgeable, certified and/or experienced in officiating the sport;

**Note: Students/athletes who are absent for safety lessons (e.g. information, skills, techniques) must be provided with the information and training prior to the next activity sessions**

**b) students/athletes should:**

- be familiar with the seriousness of concussions and the signs and symptoms of concussion;
- adhere to the safety rules of the sport/activity and use strategies to maximize safe participation (i.e., avoiding collisions, keeping the head up);
- demonstrate safe contact skills during controlled practice sessions prior to competition;
- demonstrate respect for the mutual safety of fellow athletes (e.g., no hits to the head, follow the rules and regulations of the activity);
- wear properly fitted protective equipment;
- report any sign or symptom of a concussion immediately to teacher/coach from a hit, fall or collision;



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- encourage team mates/fellow students to report sign(s) or symptom(s) of a concussion and to refrain from pressuring injured students/athletes to play.

**Note: Students/athletes who are absent for safety lessons (e.g. information, skills, techniques) must be provided with the information and training prior to the next activity sessions**





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