Facts about Traumatic Brain/Head Injury (TBI) in Children

Educator Resource 6

A TBI is caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the normal function of the brain. Not all blows or jolts to the head result in a TBI. The severity of a TBI may range from "mild" to "severe." The majority of TBIs that occur each year are concussions or other forms of mild TBI.

A concussion is a type of mild traumatic brain injury caused by a fall, blow to the head or a force that causes a sudden jolt, such as a motor vehicle accident or an event that causes head to move back and forth suddenly. Concussions can also occur from a fall or a blow to the body that causes the head and brain to move quickly back and forth. Doctors may describe a concussion as a "mild" brain injury because concussions are usually not life threatening. Even so, their effects either immediately or later in development can be serious for some children.

Possible Consequences of TBI

- In the first two to six weeks after a TBI, some children may experience:
    - Headache
    - Dizziness
    - Nausea
    - Sensitivity to light or noise
    - Confusion
    - Problems paying attention and following directions
    - Fatigue and/or disturbed sleep
    - Trouble expressing themselves

- Some children may show more long-lasting effects of a TBI. Most of these children will have had a more serious injury with long-term effects less common for children who sustained a mild TBI. These effects could include difficulties in the areas of:
    - Paying attention
    - Learning new information
    - Managing their own behavior, their work and responsibilities
    - Mood
    - Academic performance
    - Language
    - Social Skills
    - Problem Solving

While a blow or jolt to the head of a child may seem harmless at the time, it is important to document this event and discuss with a health care provider if consequences should appear later.

It is important for parents to understand how the brain develops and how the brain is rapidly changing in the first few years of life. These are formative years and how the brain develops; its foundational networks can be profoundly affected by injuries to the brain. It is essential to protect the brain during this time of development.

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