

Returning to School

A Guide for Parents, Guardians, and Caretakers*

*NOTE: The word "Parent" will be used throughout this module, but includes all of the above

Returning to School

- It is helpful to consider school re-entry as an ongoing process, not as a single event
- Each stage may require different skills, tasks, and information sharing
- Ongoing open communication between the parent, child, and school is key to a child receiving adequate support
- School re-entry can begin, stop, and resume at any point throughout recovery

Returning to School

- It is common for children who have been injured or who have visible differences to need help with school at certain times, such as when:
 - Starting school (daycare, pre-school, or kindergarten)
 - Returning to school after an injury or hospital stay
 - Moving from one grade to another
 - Changing schools
 - Refer to the "Changing Schools" module for more information

Returning to School

- The return to school process can be affected by:
 - Needs of your child
 - Severity and location of injury
 - Presence of visible differences
 - Age of your child
 - Other individual factors, such as: social support, personality, coping behaviors, family resources, previous experiences with school, etc.

What You Can Do

There are things you can do throughout your child's recovery. It is helpful to think of the process in stages:

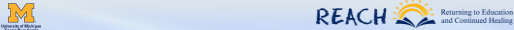
1. After the Injury
2. Going Home
3. Returning to School
 - Initial Steps
 - Ongoing Considerations

#1 After the Injury

- Contact the school and inform them of the injury. This enables them to begin preparing for your child's return to school.
- Notify your child's and siblings' educators and school counselors that an upsetting event has happened
- Keep educators and school counselors informed throughout the recovery period

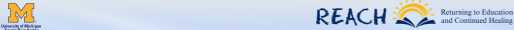
#1 After the Injury

- Provide timely and accurate information about your child's situation. You can state simple facts:
 - My child was burned
 - They are in the hospital or being seen in the clinic
 - It is estimated that my child will be out of school for: (state the amount of time estimated by medical staff)
 - I will keep you updated on their progress



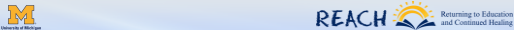
#1 After the Injury

- Share information with the school about:
 - Privacy concerns of your child and family, including visitation wishes or rules
 - Information that both you and your child approve can be told to other students
 - If there is specific information that should only be shared with school staff
 - Establish who will give and receive ongoing information



#1 After the Injury

- Encourage your child's teacher review the REACH website for information and resources. There is a section to specifically assist school personnel.
- Work with the school to help your child keep up with assignments and activities
- As soon as your child is physically ready, get their classroom assignments to bring home or take to the hospital



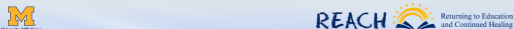
#1 After the Injury

- The length of treatment and/or hospitalization can vary. The longer it is, the more important it is to maintain contact with the school.
- Arrange various ways for your child to remain connected to classmates, such as: social networking sites, teleconferences, having them send cards, planned visits, etc.
- Consider using [Care Pages](#) or other similar free patient blogs to keep family, friends, and school peers updated



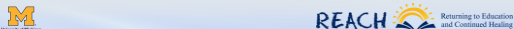
#1 After the Injury: Hospitalization

- If your child is hospitalized, there are additional things you can do to help their return to school
- Some hospitals have school assistance programs. With your permission, your child's educators and the hospital teacher can coordinate school lessons.
- Ask your child's medical care team for information on school resources available in the hospital



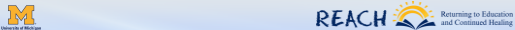
#1 After the Injury: Hospitalization

- Example of the University of Michigan Hospital School: www.mottchildren.org/mott-support-services/schooling
- There will be times when a child is too sick or busy with medical procedures to do school work. However, it should be started early in a child's hospital stay and encouraged throughout recovery.



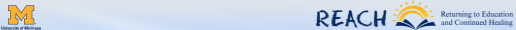
#1 After the Injury: Hospitalization

- Be sure that school activities are included in your child's daily schedule at the hospital
- Doing school work is a way to provide a sense of normal routine while in the hospital. It is also an opportunity to discuss your child's thoughts and feelings about returning to school.
- These discussions will help prepare your child for school return, identify potential issues, and allow time to find solutions



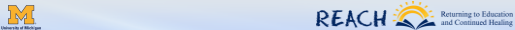
#1 After the Injury: Hospitalization

- Give updates to the school on your child's recovery and suggested means of communication with peers
- Providing accurate information throughout your child's recovery can help to prevent or correct rumors
- Consider keeping a health care binder and include information received or shared with your child's school and medical team



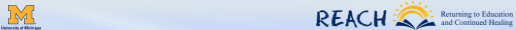
#1 After the Injury: Hospitalization

- Seek assistance from hospital and school staff in preparation for your child's return to school
- Signs that your child may need school re-entry help:
 - Expresses fears or concerns about school
 - Extended hospitalization or time away from school
 - Has visible changes in appearance
 - Has altered physical or functional abilities
 - Continues with ongoing treatment



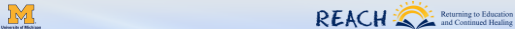
#2 Going Home

- Returning home from the hospital is an important milestone in the recovery process and should be a time of celebration
- It can also be stressful for all family members
- Children unable to physically tolerate a full day of school might need a period of homebound education or partial school days



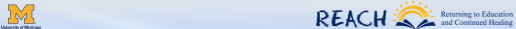
#2 Going Home

- The medical team will help you determine when your child is ready to return to school
- If your school requires it, ask the medical team to complete a medical clearance form for your child to return to school. Keep a copy in your care binder.
- If your child's medical condition changes, you may need to ask the medical team complete an updated form for the school





#2 Going Home

- Encourage your child to invite a friend(s) to visit at home before returning to school
- Ask your child if they wish to visit the school or their teachers before returning to school
- These visits can help your child learn what has been happening at school, and gives them the opportunity to share their experiences since the injury





#3 Returning to School: Initial Steps

- Returning to school is an important milestone in a child's recovery process
- The time between going home and returning to school is typically a few days - 1 week. For some it can take weeks or months.
- Keep the school informed of the target date for your child's return



#3 Returning to School: Initial Steps

- If your child tires easily, consider having them initially return for half days until they build up their strength
- Frequent follow-up visits and physical therapy appointments may need to be accommodated as a part of the return to school plan
- Children may be able to complete their physical therapy activities at school



#3 Returning to School: Initial Steps

- Inform school personnel of special care or treatment routines that need to be incorporated at school
- It is important that you ask your child how they feel about returning to school
- Make a list of questions that you and your child have for the school and medical team
- The school re-entry process should address your family's concerns



#3 Returning to School: Initial Steps

- Parents, children, and siblings may have a variety of questions or concerns, such as:
 - Will my child physically be able to manage the demands of school?
 - Will the school be able to take care of our needs?
 - How will the other children respond?
 - Will I be picked on by other students?
 - What if we don't feel ready?



#3 Returning to School: Initial Steps

- Remember, you are not alone in this process. Many parents have assisted their children to successfully return to school.
- Watch a brief video of one mother's description of helping her child
- Ask to speak with a parent from a survivor support program (e.g. SOAR)



#3 Returning to School: Initial Steps

- Consider using a re-entry educational intervention to assist your child's return. It is important to ask your child how they want to participate.
- A short classroom visit 1 – 2 days before returning to school can help your child get reacquainted
- This short visit may provide a more gradual and relaxed return than an immediate full-day of classes

#3 Returning to School: Ongoing Considerations



- The first few days and weeks of returning to school are a period of adjustment
- Parents, school personnel, and child need to assess the success of the transition back to school
- It is important to share this assessment with each other to focus on what is working and to identify any issues that still need to be addressed

Returning to Education and Continued Healing

#3 Returning to School: Ongoing Considerations



- Speak frequently with your child's educators to make sure known issues are being addressed
- Discuss how siblings of the injured child are handling the return to school
- Even if a child appears to be doing well, maintain ongoing open communication. This is key to a child feeling like they can ask for help.

Returning to Education and Continued Healing

#3 Returning to School: Ongoing Considerations



- Set up parent-teacher or parent-counselor conferences as needed
- Evaluate if any special needs or medical accommodations that were initially put into place are still working effectively
- Once you have successfully helped your child return to school you have learned important skills you may use again

Returning to Education and Continued Healing

#3 Returning to School: Ongoing Considerations



- You may need to re-initiate the school re-entry process when future changes occur, such as:
 - Starting the school year (new grade, different teachers or peers)
 - Moving to a new school or district
 - When a substitute teacher enters the classroom
- Refer to the "Changing Schools" module for additional information

Returning to Education and Continued Healing

Age Considerations: Children 2-6 Years Old



- If a child was injured at a young age, they may not enter a day care, pre-school, or kindergarten for several years
- Starting or returning to day care can be managed in the same way as a return to school
- Reading the information in this module now will help you prepare for when your child is old enough to start school

Returning to Education and Continued Healing

Age Considerations: Children 2-6 Years Old

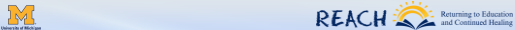
- Injuries or prolonged hospitalization at a young age may contribute to developmental delays in: motor skills, speech, behavior, emotional reactions, hearing, etc.
- Consider the need for early intervention programs (e.g. "Early On") provided through local health departments

Returning to Education and Continued Healing

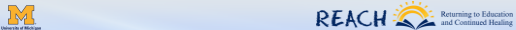
Age Considerations: Children 2-6 Years Old

- If your child is in day care, pre-school, or kindergarten, be sure to discuss the re-entry process with staff
- Share with day care and school staff the specific words that you and your child use to describe their injury and appearance. Children of this age often use special or simple words.



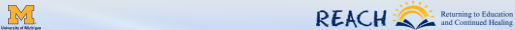
Age Considerations: Children 7-11 Years Old

- As a child grows older, the school environment places greater physical, social, and psychological demands on them
- Children must learn to deal with larger classrooms of peers with diverse backgrounds and experiences
- Body image issues can start to surface at this age



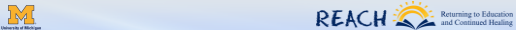
Age Considerations: Children 7-11 Years Old

- Children who have previously adjusted well at school may need extra support or help at this time
- Your child may benefit from social skills or problem-solving training. Ask your school or local community agency for resources.



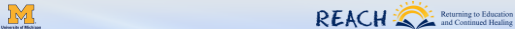
Age Considerations: Children 7-11 Years Old

- As children become involved in extra-curricular activities, consider engaging the coaches and group leaders in the school re-entry process
- It is important to specifically talk with your child about any concerns they have with:
 - Peer interaction
 - Classroom or extra-curricular activity participation such as sports, scouts, clubs, or special events



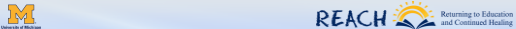
Age Considerations: Children 12-17 Years Old

- Students in middle, junior, and high school often have multiple teachers for classes throughout the day
- The school re-entry process may need to include multiple school personnel who may be located at different sites
- If your child has physical limitations, any assistance needed to move between classes or buildings needs to be taken into consideration



Age Considerations: Young Adults 18+

- A serious injury can cause a young adult to become dependent on their parents during recovery
- Encourage your young adult to grow more independent in the re-integration process
- Expect that your young adult will encounter new challenges as they enter the workforce or an advanced educational system



Age Considerations: Young Adults 18+

- You can support and help your young adult, while also encouraging independence by:
 - Helping them to anticipate changes in their school or work environment
 - Participating in ongoing discussions
 - Being positive and supportive
 - Providing advice when your young adult asks

