



Back to School – Young Adults

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As identified in the two other articles in this “Back to School” series, individuals with acquired brain injury often experience cognitive, communication, physical, emotional, and social problems that will potentially affect their academic performance in many ways. Difficulties with attention and concentration,

memory and new learning, organization and planning, understanding verbal and written instruction, keeping up with the pace of classroom activities, communicating effectively with others, peers interactions, developing and maintaining social relationships, problems with fatigue, mobility, mood changes and diminished self-confidence, are some of the common problems clients have shared with us through the years.

It’s important to recognize areas of strength.

While being able to recognize specific difficulties is important, identifying areas of strength is just as important. Concentrating on what you can do shifts the focus from ‘difficulty’ to ‘ability’. Building on strengths, and finding opportunities to use strengths to target areas of weakness, is a critical consideration when returning to school.

For example: Determining necessary academic accommodations and supports.

Many students, regardless of their age, are reluctant to consider academic accommodations for fear of being treated differently than other students. This is a normal feeling. However, academic accommodations can help students achieve their goals, and again, maximize their performance by capitalizing on their strengths.

Examples of academic accommodations that may be necessary include:

- ✓ Being made aware of assignments, tests, exams and other expectations well in advance
- ✓ More time for writing tests and exams
- ✓ Permission to write tests and exams in a quiet, distraction-free environment
- ✓ Access to a note-taker (someone to take notes, record answers on exams, etc.)

As noted in the PABICOP article, younger students with brain injuries benefit from the IPRC process (Identification, Placement and Review Committee), at which time the student’s learning needs and necessary supports are identified. Colleges and universities do not have the IPRC process as it exists in grade school; however, as Jamie Fairles wrote, these institutions frequently have departments devoted to ensuring that students with special learning needs are accommodated. These departments often have academic counselors with whom the student can meet and discuss their specific situation. If the student is working with a rehabilitation team, it is very beneficial to have team members involved to facilitate communication of strengths, weaknesses, and needs.

Student	Difficulty	Strengths	Progress
Michelle *	Trouble with speech	Michelle was clearly gifted when it came to interacting with children.	Michelle began tutoring a young student who had trouble learning to read. Regular tutoring sessions, during which Michelle and her student read aloud, provided Michelle with an opportunity to practice strategies to improve the clarity of her speech, while also doing what she loved most - teaching!
Darren *	Trouble remembering the concepts and ideas he read about in his textbooks at school.	Darren’s memory for visual information was relatively strong. He also loved to draw and doodle.	Darren learned to use his artistic skills to help him make sense of and remember the information he read.
Art *	Trouble with note-taking, remembering what he read, and recalling scheduled tasks.	Art had a knack for using computers and a variety of software programs.	Art was introduced to specific software and technological devices that enabled him to keep up with the pace at school, and keep track of all his activities.

- These are hypothetical examples, and are not meant to represent actual clients.

Other types of supports may come in the way of direct assistance in the classroom. Many are familiar with the role on the “Educational Assistants’, or ‘EAs’, in grade school. Students who return to college or university may also benefit from support in the classroom or after class. Depending on the needs, such support may include

speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, social work, psychological support, physiotherapy, rehabilitation therapy, tutoring, nursing, attendant care and /or peer support.

General Strategies for Success

The following are some very general suggestions to help you during your school year.

- ✓ Make course selection a 'team effort': get input and assistance from your rehabilitation team and academic counselor. Identify areas of strength and weaknesses, so that appropriate accommodations can be determined.
- ✓ As identified in the PABICOP article, ongoing communication is critical to success, so it's important to have regular meetings with your team and academic counselor to review progress, troubleshoot difficulties, and to 'map out a plan' for continuing education. Don't be afraid to communicate any concerns you have!
- ✓ As Jamie Fairles suggested, scheduling time for homework and studying is important. This will help you to structure your days. It is good to have a 'study routine'. Consider prioritizing what you have to do during your study time, and setting daily 'study goals'. Schedule time for recreational activities too!
- ✓ Evaluating the effectiveness of existing accommodations and strategies (Jamie Fairles suggested a few of these) is important.

Enjoy your time at school ... the possibilities are endless. Remember to focus on what you can do!