Unity Behavioral Health

Unity In Action: Youth Flag Football

Concussion & Return to Play Protocol

What is a Concussion?

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury—or TBI—caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or by a hit to the body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. This sudden movement can cause the brain to bounce around or twist in the skull, creating chemical changes in the brain and sometimes stretching and damaging brain cells. Medical providers may describe a concussion as a "mild" brain injury because concussions are usually not life-threatening. Even so, the effects of a concussion can be serious.

Concussion Signs and Symptoms:

Athletes who show or report one or more of the signs and symptoms below, or that say they just "don't feel right" after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body, may have a concussion.

Concussion Signs Observed	Concussion Symptoms Reported
Can't recall events prior to or after the hit or fall	Headache or "pressure" in head
Appears dazed or stunned	Nausea or vomiting
Forgets an instruction, is confused about a position, or unsure of game, score or opponent	Balance problems or dizziness, or double or blurry vision
Moves clumsily	Bothered by light or noise
Answers questions slowly	Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy
Loses consciousness (even briefly)	Confusion or concentration or memory problems
Shows mood, behavior, or personality changes	Just not "feeling right" or "feeling down"

Signs and symptoms generally show up soon after the injury. However, you may not know how serious the injury is at first and some symptoms may not show up for hours or days. Continue to check for signs of concussion after the injury and a few days after the injury. If an athlete's concussion signs or symptoms get worse, they should be taken to the emergency department.

Concussion Danger Signs:

In rare cases, a dangerous collection of blood (hematoma) may form on the brain after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body. Call 9-1-1 immediately, or take the athlete to the emergency department if they have one or more of the following danger signs:

Dangerous Signs & Symptoms of a Concussion
One pupil Larger than the other
Drowsiness or inability to wake up
A headache that gets worse and does not go away
Slurred Speech, weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination
Repeated vomiting or nausea, convulsions or seizures (shaking or twitching)
Unusual behavior, increased confusion, restlessness, or agitation
Loss of consciousness (passed out/knocked out). Even a brief loss of consciousness should be taken seriously

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Responding to a Concussion:

Unity is committed to the health and well-being of our athletes and has developed the following Concussion Protocol in conjunction with applicable state laws and CDC concussion guidelines.

Remove From Play

If the concussion is suspected or happens while playing (Organization)'s coaches, staff and trainers will:

1. Remove the athlete from playing – "When in doubt, sit them out."
2. Keep them from play the day of the injury until they can be assessed by a qualified provider experienced in concussion management

Athletes that return to play too soon have greater risk of a repeat concussion which can be more serious in nature.

Return to Play

After a concussion is diagnosed, Unity will allow an athlete to begin the return to play protocol after being cleared to do so by a trained medical professional.

Under the supervision of a professional trained in concussion management, the below six gradual steps over the course of time, should help to safely return an athlete to play.

1. Back to regular activities – athlete is back to regular activities and has been cleared to begin the process for return to play.
2. Light aerobic activity – light aerobic activity meant to increase heart rate. Short time increments 5-10 minutes, walking, light jog or exercise bike. No weight lifting at this step.
3. Moderate activity – Continue with activities that increases the athletes heart rate to include moderate jogging, brief running, moderate intensity stationary biking, moderate intensity weightlifting (should be less than their typical routine was)
4. Heavy, non-contact activity – Add heavy non-contact physical activity, such as sprinting/running, high intensity stationary biking, regular weightlifting routine, non- contact sport specific drills.
5. Practice & full contact – athlete may return to practice in a controlled setting.
6. Athlete may return to competition

An athlete will only move to the next step if they do not have any recurring or new symptoms at the current step. If symptoms return the athlete will stop those activities and contact the medical professional involved in managing the return to play. When no symptoms are present, they may start the progression again at the previous step.

Creating a Safe Sport Culture:

Unity will create and enforce a safe sport culture that can lower an athlete's chance of getting a concussion and create an environment that allows them to feel comfortable in reporting symptoms of a concussion.

Enforce the Rules:

Unity will enforce the rules of the sport for fair play, safety and sportsmanship. Ensure that athletes always avoid unsafe actions. Explain to athletes that good sportsmanship is always expected both on and off the field.

Talk about Concussion Reporting:

Unit's staff, coaches and volunteers will talk with athletes about the importance of reporting a concussion. Athletes may not report a concussion because they don't think symptoms are severe enough or fear losing a position on the team, letting teammates down or looking weak. Unity's staff, coaches and volunteers will provide positive messaging and praise to help make athletes comfortable with the concussion reporting system in place.

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Create a Concussion Action Plan

Unity will create an action plan that includes information and education on ways to lower the chances of concussion and enforce the steps above to safely return the athlete to play.

References:

- CDC – Injury Center – Heads Up, Brain Injury Basics: (https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/basics/index.html)
    - What is Concussion
    - Concussion Signs and Symptoms
    - Dangers Signs
    - Responding to Concussion
- Shape America – What PE Teachers should know about Concussion: (https://www.shapeamerica.org/standards/guidelines/Concussion/default.aspx)
- ImPact Applications Inc. https://impacttest.com/concussion-protocol-101-guide/