

# CHILDHOOD TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

## What is Traumatic Brain Injury?

- Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is brain damage following a sudden severe blow to the head which leads to a breakdown in brain function
- Problems due to TBI can range from mild to severe
- Issues can appear immediately after the injury or develop over time

## What is Affected by TBI?

- Physically: changes in sleep and eating patterns, delayed developmental milestones
- Sensory: problems with vision and hearing
- Cognitive: difficulty learning new things
- Behavioral: unpredictable or changeable moods, anxiety, impulsivity
- Swallowing: impairments of swallowing function

## Effects on Language and Cognition

- After a TBI, effects on a child's language skills and cognitive skills will depend on their age at the time of the injury and the severity of the damage
- Common trends observed include:
  - Cognitive Skills
    - Impaired decision-making
    - Memory impairment
  - Language Skills
    - Poor reading and listening comprehension
    - Difficulty reading new words
    - Difficulty using language
  - Speech
    - Slurred speech
    - Poor control of volume, intonation and speaking rate



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**For more information, visit:**

[www.brainline.org](http://www.brainline.org) | [www.biaaz.org](http://www.biaaz.org) | [www.azed.gov](http://www.azed.gov)

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## Effects on Social Communication

- A TBI can impair behavior and thinking skills including reasoning and self-awareness, which can lead to social difficulties such as:
  - Talking too much or too little
  - Misunderstanding of body language and facial expressions
  - Standing too close or too far from the listener
  - Inappropriate physical contact
  - Poor eye contact or staring

## Support for Children with TBI

- Use of written, visual (e.g. picture, gesture) and verbal supports
- Incorporation of group and partner activities
- Minimize environmental distractions
- Schedule breaks throughout the day in order to minimize fatigue and effects of attentional issues
- Provide additional time to complete classroom tasks
- Present new information in several different ways

## Role of the Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP)

- Evaluate the child's cognitive-communication skills and swallowing
- Recommend a treatment plan
- Work with the child to:
  - Improve language skills and social communication
  - Support organizational and problem-solving skills
  - Use an assistive device if necessary
  - Promote self-monitoring
  - Coordinate family services



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