

Common Problems Children Have After a Traumatic Brain Injury?

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Dr. Jane Gillett: Some of the most common problems of a child after a brain injury vary tremendously. If it's a mild brain injury or concussion, then the child may complain of being dizzy and losing their balance and they can complain of fatigue, they'll complain of possibly of headache. Often, they'll have a sleep disturbance. They don't process information as quickly so they fall a little bit behind in school. They might not find their words quite as easily. They're more irritable, they cry or laugh more quickly. Most kids with a mild brain injury and concussion, most will recover from it fairly well and look pretty good and will do really quite well. But there are a percentage of kids with mild brain injuries that will continue to have ongoing problems. At school, they'll have ongoing problems with their headaches and stuff. So, you have to be able to follow the children with mild brain injury to make sure that you're not missing the one that's not going to do well.

But then you get into the more moderate to severe brain injuries and most kids will recover without any sort of obvious physical disability. Now, sure there's going to be those who've been severely injured affected the motor strip of the brain and will be left with a weakness down one side or like we call hemiparesis, may even end up being in a wheel chair and needing to be cared for but most children will end up being able to be mobile, walking and running, and their biggest problems are left with their cognitive issues. And the cognitive issues can include: begin slower to process information, not being able to pay attention, being easily distracted, lacking initiation even though they want to do well, they just can't get themselves organized to get going, having organizational problems. They're all these things we call frontal lobe or executive functions because the frontal lobes are the areas of the brain that are most frequently damaged. They can also have problems with their memory, they'll have problems with emotional regulation, they may or may not recognize other people and then of course because a brain injury can effect almost any part of your brain, you might have visual motor problems so you have trouble writing, visual perceptual problems so you can't find things in space, you may not be able to see objects in your peripheral field. You may end up with pituitary dysfunction and not be able to have the normal growth hormones and other hormones for proper growth. You can end up with hearing problems. You can end up with tinnitus or ringing in your ears. You can end up not understanding what's being said to you, having trouble finding your words and not have what we call cognitive communication skills which is where you can read the person's body language and emotions and recognize that someone is asking you a question even though they haven't phrased it in a question form, all those kind of things. So, it can affect almost any area of the brain.