Distance or Online Learning for Students with Brain Injury

OVERVIEW

Distance learning is a challenge for all students and students who have experienced a brain injury, may experience significant difficulties when participating in online learning. Educators who have been trained in Return to School are a good resource to support students with brain injury during distance learning.

Students with brain injury may have difficulty with:

- Visual scanning: searching/scanning for visual information
- Attention: focusing on what is on the screen
- Memory: difficulty recognizing, encoding, and recalling information
- Cognitive fatigue: decrease in cognitive energy that occurs from focusing on sustained cognitive demands (e.g., schoolwork, learning).
- Emotional mood changes, depression, anxiety: monitor students for signs of anxiety related to online learning, increasing pandemic fears, social isolation and refer all concerns to parent, school psychologist, school counselor, and/or social worker

YOU MIGHT WANT TO CONSIDER RAISING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. Does the student need to limit or adjust screen time during the day?
2. When on screen would it help to make simple adjustments such as: decreasing brightness, increasing the size of font, reducing screen glare by changing where you sit at home, etc.
3. Do they need to create a daily schedule with structured breaks? Write this out so they can refer to it daily.
4. Do they have a way to track assignments?

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5. Does the student have signs of anxiety or depression? If so, develop appropriate supports.

RESOURCES THAT MAY HELP:

- Text-to-speech or speech-to-text. Examples:
    - Snap and Read
    - Audio Books: Audible, Scribd
    - Reads other types of documents- NaturalReader, Voice Dream Reader
    - Siri's dictation feature offers real-time speech-to-text conversion, recording the words you say as typed text on Apple products.
    - Mac Speech to Text
    - Dragon
    - Google Docs Speech to Text/Voice Typing
- Scanners with Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software which converts print-to-speech output
- Reduce visual clutter on the screen pages to reduce visual overload
    - Immersive Reader
    - Safari Reader on the Safari browser
    - Mercury Reader extension on Chrome browser
- Read exams to the student using online platforms.
- Offer "office hours" or online tutoring
- Record online session content so student can review
- Use concept mapping software, such as Simplemind– to help the student organize thoughts, get started on a writing assignment, plan a project

SUGGESTED ACCOMMODATIONS:

- Encourage students to use a computer or laptop. Online learning on a smart phone can cause eye fatigue and increase concussion symptoms.

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    - Optimize the computer display
    - Increase font to a comfortable size.
    - Adjust screen setting to enlarge entire screen
    - Dim screen brightness
    - Encourage student to try alternative screen colors
    - Contrast desktop from light to dark
- Glasses designed to filter out blue light may help reduce eye fatigue
- Reduce screen glare (encourage sitting away from windows and bright lights)
- Provide cues to scan entire screen for content.
- Have the student take breaks from the computer screen or reading.
    - Schedule longer "brain breaks" from the computer throughout day
- Reduce the length of projects and assignments
- Encourage sticking to a daily schedule
- Print PDFs on paper so the student can write on the documents
- Provide checklists that break down tasks, classwork, homework, key learning content to alleviate difficulty keeping up during online learning
- Offer regular meetings with a teacher, school counselor, social worker or school psychologist
- Encourage use of noise blocking headphones when doing schoolwork at home if there are other siblings/parents in the same room or within close vicinity

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