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A Teacher's Guide to Helping the Burn-Injured Student Return to the Classroom

Dear Teacher,

In many cases teachers are involved in their student's recovery process from the beginning of burn injury, but in many cases that is not possible. Below you will find some helpful tips to ease your student's transition back to the classroom.

What Can I Do to Help My Returning Student?

- **Stay involved throughout your student's treatment.**

Many burn survivors have times when things are going really well, and times when there may be a set back or two in their recovery. Your consistent supportive presence in the student's life will help him to return to a more normal, familiar and comforting routine.

- **Prepare to support and role model positive behavior.**

Once the initial excitement of the student's return wears off, classmates may be tempted to start teasing or isolating the burn injured child. Be prepared to model positive interactions and ways to include the student without belittling or singling him out. You can set up an accepting environment in your classroom.

- **Don't be too lenient or too strict.**

You will need to find a balance that will provide the needed flexibility of the returning student within a structured setting. Whenever possible, the burn-injured child should be expected to perform the same tasks as his classmates. This will help him to feel more confident and part of his class.

- **Give the student control whenever possible.**

Provide choices when appropriate to foster independence. This will help increase the child's self-esteem. A child who has been hospitalized for a long period of time has very little control over things that happen to and around him in that setting. You may notice behaviors that reflect that frustration.

- **Be prepared for acting out behaviors and Regression.**

A child who has survived a severe burn injury has likely experienced a great deal of trauma and loss. Acting out behaviors and regression can be a result of his experience and may be his way of coping with some of his feelings. Many children have delayed displays of trauma and loss. Contact the family, school social worker or hospital personnel if the behavior persists. Bring together the school social worker, parents and student to develop a behavior plan if necessary. A plan that is consistent at home and at school is desired. Clear consequences and follow through in a way that is respectful, not shameful, is important.

- You can find more information on grief, loss and trauma from a resource through The Phoenix Society titled "Helping Children Heal the Effects of Loss and Trauma after Burn Injury A guide for parents and caregivers" by Megan Bronson **PMHCNS-BC**.
Go to www.phoenix-society.org or call 1-800-888-2876.

- **Accommodate the student's comfort level.**

The burn-injured student may have special needs that can easily be accommodated with a teacher's assistance. Overheating can be addressed by seating location, water bottles, or a portable fan. This student may need special consideration to keep lotion in his desk for itching. Dress codes may need to be slightly adjusted to let the student dress cooler to maintain a cooler body temperature or wear a hat to feel comfortable with hair loss. Determine if it would be helpful to allow this student a few extra minutes to dress/undress.

- **Educate yourself on your student's medication and the side effects.**

You may need to work with the family and nurse to understand the side effects of your student's medication. This may help you to better understand why your student is behaving in a particular manner and what may help him to be more successful.

- **Very large burn injures.**

Burn injures of 40% Total Body Surface Area and over, affect the whole body. One of the things that happen is that the body responds by speeding up its metabolism (becomes hyper-metabolic) and essentially runs twice as fast as normal for as long as a year after the injury. Children with such large burns tend to tire more quickly than normal and may have trouble concentrating and learning when they become very tired.

See Section 7 Understanding the Impact of Childhood Loss, Trauma and Traumatic Loss.