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## ***A Parent/Guardian's Guide to Helping the Burn-Injured Child Return to the Classroom***

***Dear Parent/Guardian(s),***

***Every child will face challenges during burn recovery. Returning to the classroom can be exciting and stressful for your child. Below you will find tips to support your child along his or her journey. Each child reacts and copes differently. Please notify your health care team if you have any concerns for your child's emotional or physical health.***

### ***What Can I Do to Support My Child's Return to School?***

- **Talk about the return to school:** Depending on the age of the child, the amount and type of discussion will vary. Your child needs repeated opportunities to approach this subject with you or other trusted people. It may be hard to ask questions and express feelings. Some children will be very open with feelings and concerns while others may not. Some children may want to protect their parents by pretending they don't have fears. Talk about the opportunities for your child to be involved in the reentry program and how he feels about addressing his classmates
- **Keep in mind for burn survivors: Very large burn injures, 40% Total Body Surface Area and over, affect the whole body.** One of the things that happens 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.

#### **Discussion ideas:**

What will be the hardest part of going back?

What will the other kids think?

How will I be able to do\_\_\_\_\_?

Who will help me if I am feeling very sad, or mad or scared?

Who will help me if I'm not feeling well, if I need a dressing change, or if I need medication?

What if the kids make fun of me?

I'm afraid they will ask too many questions.

How will I keep up with all my schoolwork?

Can I go to recess?

Can I still do my favorite sport/activity?

What if I don't like being back at school?

- **Practice:** Returning to school for some children goes easily and effortlessly, while others are fearful and insecure about facing their classmates. A practice trip to the school may be a huge first step for the apprehensive child. Don't underestimate how seemingly small things can be very big things to your child. You can help your child by getting him on a wake and sleep schedule similar to what he or she will have when he returns to school. Practice answering questions and dealing with stares in places that are safe for the child such as at home or a relative's house and include the entire family. Rehearse and role play how to handle difficult or awkward situations ahead of time so your child feel empowered to respond appropriately.
- **Involve the entire family:** This is a huge transition for the child returning to school, but it is also a very big transition for the loved ones who have been caregivers over the past several weeks/months. Siblings may have anxiety or concerns about their brother's or sister's return to school, especially if they attend the same school. It is not uncommon for siblings to fear the unwanted attention that may result from the changes and experiences of the burninjured child. Make sure to involve the entire family when practicing what to say when asked questions, how to handle teasing, and other supportive tactics to help them feel prepared. You may all need extra support to feel comfortable letting the burn injured child return to school. It is natural for a parent to want to protect his or her child, and normal for siblings to feel both excited and scared.
- **Help your child to reconnect** with friends before school starts. Plan a special occasion or play date with the child's close friends to help them all feel more comfortable. This will also provide a group of support people for your child when he or she returns to school. (You may want to include the parents too.) Consider involving close friends in the reentry program. Returning to school can also restore a sense of normalcy after injury, trauma or loss.
- **Prepare to support and role model positive behavior.** Be prepared to model positive ways to interact with others. Keep close contact with the teacher(s) to keep the same message throughout the support of your child at home and at school. Once the excitement of the student's return wears off, classmates may be tempted to start teasing or isolating the returning child (or siblings of the child). Be prepared to model positive ways to interact with others when this happens. Have close contact with the teacher(s) to keep the same message throughout the support of your child at home and at school. You can check your local bookstore or internet store for the following books: