

SPOTTING A CONCUSSION

Children and teens who show or report one or more of these symptoms may have a concussion or other brain injury.

SIGNS OBSERVED BY PARENTS OR COACHES

- Appears dazed or stunned
- Forgets an instruction, is confused about an assignment or is unsure of the game, score or opponent
- Moves clumsily
- Answers questions slowly
- Loses consciousness, even briefly
- Shows mood, behavior or personality changes
- Can't recall events prior to or after a hit or fall

SYMPTOMS REPORTED BY CHILDREN AND TEENS

- Headache or "pressure" in head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Balance problems or dizziness, or double or blurry vision
- Bothered by light or noise
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy or groggy
- Confusion, or concentration or memory problems
- Just not "feeling right" or "feeling down"

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control fact sheet

MAKING KIDS FOOTBALL SAFER

Now that the health risks of football have been in the national spotlight for several years, coaches and administrators have had time to respond with new policies and procedures.

"USA Football, the governing body of youth football across the U.S., has made major changes," said Stallworth. "Limited contact, new, improved coaching techniques. They're attacking this issue aggressively."

In December 2018, Renown held a concussion summit in Reno to teach coaches, parents and athletes how to identify and address concussions.

Stallworth said that protective gear for kids has improved. Designs for mouthpieces, chinstraps and helmets have been tweaked in recent years, which has prevented injuries. And the school district takes an additional measure. "Every helmet has to go through a reconditioning process after every season," Stallworth said.

He added that coaches and administrators have become more cautious about identifying and monitoring concussions. "We're keeping a kid out who might have a slight headache, and we're keeping that kid out for an extended amount of time," he said. "A kid can be out for 10 days. Even if there's a symptom of a possible concussion, we go into protocol."

Brian McGee from Sierra Youth Football League said that, in the past, "We were probably doing things incorrectly. We were throwing safety out the door." But now, in his league, running full-speed at an opponent

from 10 yards apart is not allowed. And his coaches take USA Football's online safety certification course, which teaches them how to prevent heat exhaustion, identify and respond to concussions and cardiac arrest, and teach safer blocking and tackling techniques.

McGee also said that, once kids are ready to start high school football, the safest thing they can do is to show up prepared. "If you ask any football coach, it's dangerous to have high schoolers who haven't played before," he said. "They need to know how to block properly, how to be tackled properly. ... We want to introduce people to tackle football." His youngest players, 5- and 6-year-olds, have the option of flag football or tackle football.

In many high schools, including local ones, the amount of contact time is limited in the name of safety. "In the younger divisions, I'm opposed to that," McGee said. It may sound counterintuitive, but he's thinking about safety. "If we only were allowed to have contact for 20 minutes a week, my concern with that is—we get onto game day, and we're in a live action situation," he said. When it comes to younger kids and contact, he reasoned, learning to do it properly is safer than avoiding it. "I could see limiting contact when they're in high school," he added.

"All levels of football have worked hard to change the culture," said McGee.

"Everyone's being a lot more cautious," said Stallworth. □

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