



TRANSPORT
ACCIDENT
COMMISSION

TAC information for families
of children with injuries



At home with the family

This booklet contains a series of suggestions that may help you and your family adjust to life at home and face any challenges with increased confidence.

For information about the TAC in your own language, call one of the numbers listed on the back of this booklet.

The TAC acknowledges the contribution of the following organisations in the development of this booklet:

- The Royal Children’s Hospital
- Scope
- Noah’s Ark
- Centre for Community Child Health
- The Royal Children’s Hospital Education Institute
- The TAC Disability Advisory Committee



Sakith’s story

Eight-year-old Sakith had his accident five months after moving to Melbourne from Sri Lanka.

After the crash, his medical condition deteriorated in the ambulance and there were some concerns he could have a head injury. Sakith fractured his leg and was in a wheelchair for two months.

Sakith returned to school two months after his crash, using a walking frame. He had physiotherapy on his leg and was back using his scooter to ride to school four months after the crash.

Sakith said his friends had been a great support, visiting him while in hospital and at home while he was recovering.

“At school, they helped me when I was having trouble walking or playing.”

Now Sakith is back to full health, progressing well at school. Sakith’s dad Chaminda said the family really appreciated the TAC’s support in helping his son recover.



Our goal is to help your child lead as normal a life as possible and to ensure that fun is an integral part of their childhood.

Introduction

When you take your child home from hospital, you may feel unsure about what the future holds.

What sort of care and support can my child expect? Who will pay for this care and support? How will my child adjust to life back at home? When will they be able to start or return to school? How will friends and siblings react? Can my child have fun again and enjoy 'just being a kid'?

As parents, these feelings of uncertainty are natural. Looking after a child with an injury is a journey with many ups and downs. It is difficult to know exactly what to expect and sometimes you may feel like you have lost control.

The aim of this booklet is to give you information and advice to help you through this journey and to help you regain control. It contains a series of suggestions that may help you and your family adjust to life at home and face any challenges with increased confidence.

There is also a reference list of community organisations with this booklet. These organisations can provide you with further useful information and advice to help you make informed decisions about your child's future.

How the TAC can help

The TAC can pay for the medical, rehabilitation and disability services your child needs as a result of their transport accident injuries. The TAC's ability to fund these services is dependent on legislation (the Transport Accident Act 1986), your child's needs – as determined by qualified health professionals – and the relationship between those needs and your child's injuries.

We encourage you to call your child's TAC Support Coordinator to discuss your child's goals and the different services that may help your child achieve these goals. For information about the services the TAC can and cannot pay for, refer to the brochure *About the TAC* or visit our website at www.tac.vic.gov.au

Planning for the future

As well as paying for services, we are also there to listen to you whenever your family needs support. We will work together with you, community groups and health care professionals to make sure you receive help when you need it.

We will work with you to plan ahead and anticipate change, so that when your child starts school, for example, or joins a club, they will have access to the right supports.

Our goal is to help your child lead as normal a life as possible and to ensure that fun is an integral part of their childhood. But we will need your help. Each time you contact us, let us know if the services we are paying for are working effectively. Tell us about your child's changing needs and goals as your family tackles the challenges ahead.



Working with health care professionals

At home, doctors and therapists will continue to monitor your child's progress. These health care professionals will work with you to develop a rehabilitation program that you and your child can do together at home.

Make sure you understand exactly what the health care professionals are telling you during the development of this program. Ask them to explain everything in clear, simple language and if you still don't understand, keep asking questions until you do.

We encourage you to contribute your own suggestions and opinions to this program. No one knows more about the needs, abilities and preferences of your child than you. And when the program starts, ask your child if they think it is working.

Ask the health care professionals how your child can do their program in a familiar and comfortable setting. This is possible with a little planning and imagination. They may be able to do some exercises in the bath at home, for example, rather than the hydrotherapy pool, or the local playground rather than the physiotherapist's office. Rehabilitation away from a medical environment can be fun, especially if it can be incorporated into your child's play.

Getting better

Don't put extra pressure on yourself or your child by setting a date for recovery. Everyone improves at a different rate – your child may show rapid improvement for several weeks, stay at the same level for months then begin to improve again. Some children will live lives that are different from the ones you and they expected them to have before the accident. This doesn't mean that they can't enjoy life. Children with injuries make progress and achieve success in many different things.

It's important that you remain patient and work towards small gains rather than push your child to get better quickly. Set some short term goals to help motivate yourself and your child to stick

to the rehabilitation program you developed with the health care professionals.

Stick to the program because you want to play in the park together as soon as you can. Stick to the program because you want your child to learn how to use cutlery at the dinner table again. Stick to the program because you want your child to go to the movies with friends next week.

Focus on what your child can do, not on what they can't do. Make a list of the good things they have done this week and stick it on the fridge door. And if your child achieves a goal, don't hesitate to celebrate. You might buy them a new toy, for example, or visit their favourite place.

Remember that your child is a child first and a patient second. If the rehabilitation program is getting too much, take some time out with your child to relax. Go on a family outing, for example, or play a board game together. Contact organisations that offer recreational opportunities for children with injuries. Refer to the list of community services enclosed in this booklet. These organisations can suggest activities that you and your family can enjoy together.

You may consider talking to your child's health care professionals about the possibility of giving your child a break from treatment for a short time.

Going to school

Starting or returning to school can be a challenge for a child with an injury. But with appropriate planning and the right supports, your child can receive a good education and develop their social skills. They can enjoy school and may progress to higher levels of education.

Before your child starts, the TAC and the school may set up a Program Support Group. This group will include you, the principal and the teachers at the school. It may also include the health professionals who are working with your child. Together, you will work with the TAC to anticipate the challenges your child may face and develop a school program that meets their individual needs. During this planning phase, make sure you ask your child for their ideas. What plans and hopes do they have for their school life? How would they feel about going to school part-time and returning gradually to a full-time schedule? Would they feel comfortable with the one-on-one support of an integration aide?

Most children don't want to be singled out or receive 'special attention' at school. With this in mind, the program should aim to strike the right balance between meeting your child's needs and ensuring they are treated like every other child in the classroom. You can help with this by explaining

to the teachers how your child's injury affects them. This will help the teachers plan ahead so your child can participate and learn from every class and school activity.

When your child starts school, the Program Support Group should still meet regularly – once a term if possible – to monitor how the program is going. If you believe the program could be improved or should change let the school know then contact the TAC. If your child becomes withdrawn or unhappy after starting school, contact the school or the TAC person managing your child's claim.

Making friends

Making friends and playing with other children is a very important part of school. It can be difficult, however, to make or maintain friendships if your child returns to school after a long absence.

You can help rebuild these friendships before your child even starts school. Ask some of their friends to your house to enjoy a movie, for example. If you have a family computer, encourage your child to send emails to friends. This will help your child keep in touch with the latest news and 'gossip' from school.

Find out the latest trend in the playground. It may be football card swapping or Lego, for example. Practise these at home with your child and help them learn the rules (if they don't already know them).

When they start school, encourage your child to participate in extra curricular activities such as sports, musicals or camps. Talk to the coaches or the teachers to make sure your child's needs are met. Don't let your child's injuries hold them back from participating in things that make school fun.



The TAC will work with you, your child's school and community based providers to help your child achieve their goals.

Leisure and fun

Fun is certainly a big part of 'being a kid'. Fun can take many forms. For many children it's about sport on Saturdays or playing with a ball in the playground. For some it means being part of organisations such as Scouts or Guides, while for others it's about playing an instrument in the school band or enjoying arts and crafts.

Some children with injuries may be able to return to the activities they enjoyed before their accident. Others may be faced with the challenge of finding new interests to suit their new circumstances. But just by having fun and being involved with other children, your child can learn social skills and boost their confidence and self esteem. If your child can no longer play football, for example, they may be able to keep score or be the goal umpire. Ask your child about the activities they would like to pursue and talk to the coach of the team or the teacher at school about ways of making these activities possible.

There are organisations in the community that offer fun activities for children with a serious injury. Some of these organisations even have a range of toys your child can borrow free of charge.

Looking after yourself and your family

Taking time out

Being a parent is both challenging and rewarding. Looking after a child who has an injury can also be exhausting. You need to look after yourself so that you can look after your child and the rest of the family.

It's easy to establish a pattern where life revolves around the needs of your child. You need to take time out occasionally. Try to keep up your own hobbies and interests and have some fun. You can tackle challenges better if you are relaxed and refreshed. And your child will benefit too. Children learn how to enjoy themselves from parents who have hobbies and interests.

There are organisations you can contact that will help you find time to relax, and perhaps spend time with your partner or other children.

Friends

Don't be alarmed if some friends find it difficult to adjust to your family's new circumstances. Some friends fall away, but others offer great support in all sorts of different ways.

Try to stay in touch with your friends. Explain to them how your child's injury has affected you and let them know how they can support you. You could ask them to baby-sit your children when you want a night out, for example, or you could invite them to 'lend an ear' when you go out for coffee. Your friends may have children of their own that your child can play with when they visit.

You may also make new friends. There are organisations that can put you in touch with other parents of children with a serious injury. You may want to join a parent group and share issues and ideas with people who have had similar experiences. Other parents are also a good source of information to find out what is available in the community for your child and family.

Siblings

Brothers and sisters also need time to adjust when your child returns home. It can be traumatic for them, especially if they don't understand exactly what is happening.

If you have other children, keep them informed about your child's injury at a level they can understand. Siblings can sometimes overhear bits of information and make the wrong assumptions about what is happening. They need to understand why their brother or sister needs special care. Children may think that this extra care is about being 'favourite' and feel left out.

Try to find time to talk to your other children. It might involve you turning off the television in the evening and catching up on their activities at school. Even a simple gesture like this lets them know you are still interested in their lives.

If you think your other children are having difficulties coping with the new circumstances at home, there are organisations that can help.





Support and counselling

Sometimes you may feel sad and frustrated and grieve about the many challenges your child has to face. Other times you may wonder if you've made the right decisions for your child. These feelings are natural and common to parents in your circumstances.

Remember, you have always made decisions with your child's best interests in mind. And if you need to talk to someone about these feelings, help is available.

You, and the rest of your family, may be eligible for TAC funded counselling from a doctor, psychologist or approved social worker. Call the TAC person managing your child's claim and ask for more information.

Your local community health centre can also set up an appointment with a social worker or refer you or the rest of your family to an outside agency. There are several organisations that can help and many of their services are free. Or you may find it useful to talk things through with your friends at a parent group.

Just by having fun and being involved with other children, your child can learn social skills and boost their confidence and self esteem.

Work with us into the future

The TAC is committed to funding the right support services. Even if your request for funding relates to something we cannot pay for, we will do our best to point you in the right direction.

We will continue to offer you opportunities and options at home, at school and at play – immediately and in the longer term. We will work with you, your child's school and community based providers to help your child achieve their goals and a greater degree of independence.

Contact us

Telephone

8.30am to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday

1300 654 329 (local call)

1800 332 556 (toll-free outside
the Melbourne metropolitan area)

Address

60 Brougham Street
Geelong VIC 3220

Mailing address

TAC
PO Box 742
Geelong VIC 3220

Website

www.tac.vic.gov.au

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For information about the TAC in your own language, call one of the numbers listed here

العربية
1300 138 639

Tiếng Việt
1300 139 074

Ελληνικά
1300 138 642

English
1300 139 076

廣東話
1300 138 640

Italiano
1300 138 643

Türkçe
1300 139 073

All other languages
1300 139 075

Polski
1300 139 072

普通话
1300 139 071

Hrvatski
1300 138 641