

Tipsheet for Survivors

From the **Brain Injury Law Firm of New Mexico** from content generously supplied by the **Brain Injury Association of Kansas/Greater Kansas City**.

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Tips for a Person with a Brain Injury

A mutually cooperative attitude between the person with a brain injury and those close to him or her is certainly desired for optimum rehabilitation. Recovery is dependent on committed and persistent effort from everyone involved. The following are tips that may help you along with your recovery.

Please remember that no two people are alike and what may work for some may not for others. You may also consider seeking a family or individual therapist to help you deal with depression, anxiety, difficulty in relationships and identifying goals.

- **Keep a detailed calendar of things you do and plan to do.** This builds self-confidence, independence, and self-responsibility.
- **Ask questions, but ask yourself first.** This will help you to be independent and encourages critical thinking.
- **Write things down.** This helps achieve multi-modal learning; you hear it, you write it and see it. Just writing it down greatly helps you remember even if you do not ever look at your notes.
- **Use no drugs or alcohol;** these only dull the brain.
- **Avoid terms such as “I can’t”.** They remind us of negative thinking about ourselves. Be positive about what you can do.
- **Limit the use of words like “later”, “maybe” or “kind of”.** These can keep things vague and limit your willingness to commit to something.
- **Have goals, but be realistic.** Keep reassessing these goals to make sure that they are reachable and achievable.
- **Know yourself and what you can and cannot do.** Be honest about this, and always make sure you are aware of what you are doing.
- **Always consider the optimistic side of things.** Focus on the positives.
- **Be willing to do new things.**
- **Be outgoing to get along with others; accept others; do not judge others, respect individuality.**
- **Be organized.**
- **Do not be afraid to accept help.**

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Tips for Parents of Children with Brain Injury

- **Learn about Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).**
The more you know, the more you can help yourself and your child. See the list of resources and organizations at the end of this publication. Work with the medical team to understand your child's injury and treatment plan. Don't be shy about asking questions. Tell them what you know or think. Make suggestions.
- **Keep track of your child's treatment.**
A 3-ring binder or a box can help you store this history. As your child recovers, you may meet with many doctors, nurses, and others. Write down what they say. Put any paperwork they give you in the notebook or throw it in the box. You can't remember all this! Also, if you need to share any of this paperwork with someone else, make a copy. Don't give away your original!
- **Talk to other parents whose children have TBI.** There are parent groups all over the U.S. Parents can share practical advice and emotional support. Call NICHCY (1-800-695-0285) to find out how to find parent groups near you.
- **If your child was in school before the injury, plan for his or her return to school.** Get in touch with the school. Ask the principal about special education services. Have the medical team share information with the school.
- **When your child returns to school, ask the school to test your child as soon as possible** to identify his or her special education needs. Meet with the school and help develop a plan for your child called an Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- **Keep in touch with your child's teacher.** Tell the teacher about how your child is doing at home. Ask how your child is doing in school.

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Tips for Family and Friends of a Person with a Brain Injury

Whether you are a person who has a brain injury or a friend or family member, it is common to occasionally feel isolated, overwhelmed or unsure where to go for help.

The good news is that whether you have a simple question or are facing a major crisis, there are many organizations committed to helping you find what you need.

You may also consider seeking professional advice from a family or individual therapist to help you cope with issues of grief, depression, stress or other concerns that you may be experiencing.

Early Stages of Recovery:

- Talk about familiar names, places, interests, pets.
- Show familiar photos of family, friends, pets, etc.
- Talk about what is happening at home, work, among friends.
- Keep the person's physical environment the same. Do not move things in the room to different locations.

Avoiding Frustration:

- The brain injury may cause "slow motion" thinking.
- Bright lights, too many people talking, radio or television may be overstimulating. When the senses get overloaded, the person may withdraw, get angry and irritable, cry, pace or become combative.
- Keep activities and surroundings relatively simple. Too much, too fast, too soon causes confusion.
- Encourage rest breaks or periods to avoid fatigue and frustration.
- Explain activities fully before initiating them.
- Write things down; draw charts, use calendars or a memory book to serve as reminders.
- Surroundings should have structure, routine, familiarity and consistency, such as regularly scheduled meals, activities and rest.

Behavior Challenges:

- Provide positive feedback for appropriate behavior. Give honest feedback, with brief, to the point, constructive criticism for inappropriate behavior.
- Mistakes and accidents will happen—never ridicule the person when they do.
- Lead by example. Rather than telling your family member to calm down, present yourself in a calm, patient manner.
- Avoid situations that provoke behaviors you are trying to reduce.
- Redirect the person's attention rather than challenging or arguing with them.
- Write things down that you want the person to do. This might include writing out the sequence of a task.

Communication:

- Do not patronize or become condescending. Do not make fun of or ridicule.
- Give the person time to process what you are saying and to respond. Present only one idea at a time.
- Although the person may have an inability to find a word or to say what he/she means, that does not mean that his/her intelligence is lost.
- Speak in a normal tone and volume of voice.
- Refrain from using "loaded" questions that cannot be answered with yes or no. "Did you want to watch TV, play a game or go outside?" Instead, ask direct, concrete questions that can be answered with yes or no. "Did you swim today in therapy?" rather than, "What did you do in therapy?"
- Persons with brain injuries may or may not understand abstractions, sarcasm or jokes.

Acceptance:

- Accept setbacks as a normal part of life.
- A sense of humor helps.
- Be realistic, not overly optimistic or pessimistic.
- Look ahead and not back. The person's present and future abilities—both physical and mental, may never match abilities prior to the injury.
- Be careful not to compare his/her future with the past. Concentrate on abilities the person has now.
- Maintain the person's dignity by respecting him/her.

Looking Ahead

- The person who has sustained the brain injury often must develop a new sense of self. Family members may face similar challenges as the family is redefined and roles change. This is a gradual process, which can be different for each person.
- Adjustment doesn't mean that people are happy about the changes, but that they recognize what can be changed and what cannot be changed, and begin to set goals and make decisions based on their new self. One day at a time, is a philosophy that many people adopt.
- Initially, individuals and families may feel overwhelmed, powerless and out of control. Learning what brain injury is, identifying the changes that the injury has caused, and adjusting can be challenging and difficult, but this process can restore some sense of control and choice.