
RELATING TO A PERSON WITH A BRAIN INJURY

The family is an important part of the rehabilitation team. The following suggestions may help in relating to the person with brain injury.

Creating a Familiar Environment

- Speak of familiar names, places, interests, and experiences.
- Talk about familiar people and what is happening at home.
- Bring in photos of family, friends, and pets.
- Have a few friends or family visit regularly, but not more than two people at one time.
- Hang a calendar or clock in the room.

Stimulation

- Keep a balance between stimulation and quiet times.
 - Examples of stimulating activities are watching TV, listening to the radio, sitting in a chair.
 - Examples of quiet-time activities are resting, no TV, no visitors.
- Follow the schedule for visiting times and rest times.
 - Too many visitors are confusing
 - Too much TV is hard for the person
- Remember, the person with brain injury is thinking in slow motion.
- Follow the schedule consistently, but be aware that the survivor may fluctuate day to day in his/her tolerance for activity (stimulation). The person may withdraw, “explode”, cry, or become combative in response to overstimulation.



CONSISTENT
SCHEDULE

Source: Patient Education and Discharge Planning Manual for Rehabilitation, Kelly B. Wascher(ed.), Aspen Publishers, Inc., 1995

Communication

- Remember that communication is important to the survivor who is thinking in slow motion.
 - Ask simple questions.
 - Ask positive questions.
- Let the person make choices. For example: “Do you want a drink?” rather than “Don’t you want a drink?”
- Give praise when appropriate greetings and conversations happen.
- Let the person search for the right word, but say the word before he or she gets frustrated or says the wrong word.
- Support and encourage efforts to talk. For example, when the person says, “I want to...” it may help to repeat “I want to ...” as the person searches for the next word.
- Ask the person to name objects or describe actions. Give clues such as: “What are you holding in your hand?” or “What are you doing with your toothbrush?”
- Remember, the person may have problems finding words. This does not mean he or she is not smart.
- Tell the person when he or she repeats a word or activity repetitively, but don’t make an issue of it.
- Ask questions with yes/no answers. It is better to ask, “Was Dad here last night?” rather than, “Who visited last night?”
- Encourage gestures and talking with hands to help find the right word.
- Be prepared for swearing and use of wrong words.
- Discourage exaggeration of facts or made-up stories.
- Orient the person to day, date, time, and place.
- Say exactly what you mean. The survivor will take everything literally.
- When communicating with the person with a brain injury, **DON’T DO THE FOLLOWING:**
 - Tease or encourage the person to say inappropriate words.
 - Put the person on display or force him/her to speak in front of others. This may be upsetting or embarrassing.
 - Insist that the person use correct pronunciation, or “talk straight”. There is nothing he or she wants more than to do just that.
 - Overestimate the person’s ability to understand what is being said.
 - Pretend to understand.
 - Talk for the person unless necessary.
 - Use sarcasm. Everything said will be taken literally. For example, saying, “I’ll be back in a minute,” means just that—a person will be back in one minute.

ATTITUDES

DO

Be honest about the injury.

Look ahead—not back—and help the person do the same.

Praise appropriate behaviour immediately.

Laugh with the person when appropriate.

End each visit on a positive note.

Redirect the person to another activity when he or she feels embarrassed.

Remember that no two people are alike.

Remember the person may laugh or cry easily.

Help the person relax by being calm and patient.

Keep the person safe.

DON'T

Over-encourage, such as, "You'll be all right. You'll be back to work in no time."

Compare present abilities with abilities before the injury.

Scold—for example, for lost control of bowel/bladder.

Laugh when a situation is not funny. Often, the person may not know what is funny.

Leave angry.

Tease, punish, or make the person feel guilty or childish for mistakes.

Compare.

Tease when this happens.

Use one-word commands like "Relax!" This may cause anger, resentment, and agitation.

Rely on what the person says he/she can do.

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