

Toolkit for TBI Support Group Facilitators

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Introduction

Dear Support Group Facilitator,

Thank you for volunteering your time to help support members of the community whose lives have been affected by TBI. The materials in this Toolkit are for you to use to help you facilitate your group.

Each of the eight topics in Section 2 includes the following sections: Facts and Tips, Tips for Caregivers, Discussion Questions, and Group Activities. Section 3 contains three separate sections of general group activities. There are many ideas here that you can use with your group, and each activity can be used on its own or combined depending on group interest.

Here are some ideas for how to best use these materials:

Tips for using the Facts and Tips sheets and the Tips for Caregivers:

- You can give these handouts to group members who are interested in more information on a specific topic.
- You can also refer to these sheets to help answer group members' questions.

Tips for using the Discussion Questions and the Group Activities:

- Decide which topics your group is most interested in and use the materials related to that topic. You may want to ask your group for input.
- Think about the abilities of the members of your group and pick discussion questions and group activities that you think they will be able to do. You may also modify the activities so that all group members can participate.

Sincerely,

Morgan Benson, Francis Cruzata, Frances Fisher, and Christopher Page
University of Washington Master of Occupational Therapy Students
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About the Authors

These materials were created by Morgan Benson, Francis Cruzata, Frances Fisher, and Christopher Page, University of Washington Master of Occupational Therapy students, in conjunction with the Brain Injury Association of Washington (BIAWA) and the University of Washington Traumatic Brain Injury Model System. The students received support and guidance from their faculty advisor, Janet Powell, PhD., OTR/L, Associate Professor of Occupational Therapy and Co-director of the UW TBI Model System, and Dr. Kathleen Bell, Chief of Service for UWMC Rehabilitation, Director of UW TBI Model System, and BIAWA Education Committee Chair and Board Member. We would also like to thank the many members of the TBI community in Washington State who gave us valuable input on this project.

Communication

Facts and Tips

It is very common for communication skills to be affected by a traumatic brain injury. The most common problem for individuals with a brain injury is social communication.

Social communication is the process of interacting with another person in order to exchange information and experiences with others.

Communication partners include familiar persons, such as family and friends, and those who may be casual acquaintances or strangers, such as employers and doctors.

Social communication is very complicated and requires using many cognitive abilities at the same time. Since many of these abilities may have been impacted by a TBI, it is understandable that a brain injury could lead to difficulties when communicating with others. Many survivors can talk well, but do not listen as well. Staying on topic is another common challenge.

A lack of communication skills can lead to difficulty forming and maintaining relationships. Here are several strategies for improving communication skills that can help.

- **Be a good listener.** Ask questions of the person you are talking to. Everyone enjoys talking to a good listener. Making eye contact while rephrasing and repeating back to the other person something they have said shows that you are listening and also helps you remember what they said. Compliments are also appreciated when appropriate (and not too personal). Keep the conversation positive.
- **Check out anything you don't understand.** If you are comfortable doing this, you may explain to a conversation partner that you have had a brain injury and that you might ask them to speak more slowly or repeat back what they have said because it helps you to remember.

- **Practice conversational skills.** Think of conversation as a game which has several rules that should be followed so that it is enjoyable for everyone. One of the rules is that the conversation partners take turns. A turn should be short, so that the other person stays involved and does not get bored. Another rule is to respect the other person's personal space and not stand too close to them.
- **Stay on the topic.** When you are having a conversation, respond to what the person has said and ask questions related to the topic. Don't bring up something just because it is important to you unless it is related to the conversation.
- **Come up with conversation topics before you need them.** If you know you will find yourself in a social situation and worry about not being able to think of something to say, plan ahead and come up with a list of topics. The newspaper is a good source. Family members might help you think of others. It's okay to write your ideas down and keep them close at hand to remind you.
- **Choose one thing at a time that you want to work on.** Don't try to work on everything at once. Focus on one thing at a time. It might be taking turns or asking good questions.
- **Get feedback from your family and friends.** Ask your family members or friends to help you by telling you what you are doing right. Ask them to let you know in private when you are getting off-topic, or are talking for too long, or have brought up an inappropriate topic.

Communication

Tips for Caregivers

Difficulty communicating effectively with others is one of the most common and difficult problems facing a person following a brain injury. A person with a brain injury may require a significant amount of support in order to be able to participate well in social activities. The following suggestions will help you to help him or her.

- **Communicate clearly with the survivor.** A brain injury survivor may be less able to understand and sympathize with the feelings of others than before they had a TBI and may be less adept at communicating emotions to others. They also may not understand the unspoken parts of conversation such as body language and facial expressions. It may be necessary to describe your feelings to them very directly and clearly.
- **Provide support and opportunities to practice.** Before going to a social event, even a small family gathering, give the person information ahead of time and possibly rehearse possible social situations that might come up. Be aware that a brain injury survivor isn't always able to adapt to the environment and behave differently in a restaurant than at home, for example. It may help if you describe the appropriate behavior.
- **Be kind when giving constructive feedback.** When giving feedback, it is always important to do so in a polite and respectful manner and to point out what they did well. Give examples of how the situation could have been handled better.
- **Have realistic expectations.** Do not expect behavior to change because the event is important to you. Be patient and remember that the person with a brain injury is doing the best they can. Communication problems often get better with time.

Communication

Discussion Questions

Purpose of discussion questions: These questions are designed to start discussion among group members about some common areas of difficulty with communication and about different strategies group members use to help them function more effectively.

Tips for leading a discussion:

To plan for the discussion, choose the questions that you think would be most appropriate for your group. Be flexible during the discussion and let group members talk about what is most important to them.

Take rough notes during the discussion to keep track of key points. You might want to have someone else take notes for you.

If the discussion gets off-topic, you can re-ask the question gently to remind the group of the topic.

To end the discussion, ask for any final comments and briefly summarize what was discussed.

Question:

What are some of the problems that you experience when talking to other people?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Having difficulty concentrating so that I hear everything the other person says*
- *Forgetting what the other person has said*
- *Thinking of things to say*

Question:

Is having a conversation harder in some situations than in others? What are those situations?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Having a conversation when there is a lot of other noise in the background*
- *Having a conversation when I am doing something else at the same time*
- *Having to remember what the other person has said (for example, at an appointment with my doctor)*

Question:

What do you do to practice to practice and improve your communication skills?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Listen carefully to the other person*
- *Ask questions so they know you are interested in what they are saying*
- *Ask to make notes to help remember*

Communication

Group Activity

“What Went Wrong?”

Purpose of activity: This group activity is designed to help group members practice communication skills.

Tips for leading this activity:

Ask everyone if they would like to be involved, but if a group member is uncomfortable, they can quietly wait for the next topic.

Try to give everyone a chance to participate. Ask members with a lot to say to be respectful of others who need time to talk.

Directions:

Starting on the next page, there are scripts of two conversations, one that went badly and one that went well. Have one person speak the role of Stan and another person speak the role of Bob. Use the follow-up questions to have the group talk about what went wrong in the conversation and what went well.

Conversation #1

Stan: I had an exciting day today. I had a job interview at J.C.Penney and I think it went really well.

Bob: I went in there once to buy a pair of pants when they had a sale going on and I couldn't find a pair in my size. The only pants that they had that I liked were extra-large! I may have gained some weight recently, but I'm not extra-large. My uncle, on the other hand, was a really big guy – he probably wore extra-large.

Stan: So anyways, I think I might get the job. The boss really seemed to like me.

Bob: I had a job once that I was really good at, and I thought the boss really liked me, but then I got fired.

Stan: I've got to go – see you around.

Follow-up questions:

Why did Stan leave so abruptly?

What went wrong in this conversation?

What could Bob have said differently?

Conversation #2:

Stan: I had an exciting day today. I had a job interview at J.C. Penney and I think it went really well.

Bob: Wow. That does sound exciting. Tell me more about it.

Stan: Well, I got my clothes ready the night before, and made sure they were clean and ironed, and I got there on time, which has always been a big issue for me.

Bob: Sounds like you made a big effort to be prepared.

Stan: Yes, I did. I even practiced answering questions that an employer might ask. I got my brother to help me.

Bob: I bet the employer got a good impression of you.

Follow-up questions:

What did Bob do better this time?

What are some other questions Bob could have asked?

Communication

Group Activity

“Practicing Communication Skills”

Purpose of activity: This group activity is designed to help group members practice communication skills.

Tips for leading this activity:

Ask everyone if they would like to be involved, but if a group member is uncomfortable, they can quietly wait for the next topic.

Try to give everyone a chance to participate. Ask members with a lot to say to be respectful of others who need time to talk.

Directions:

Use the Conversation Starters sheet in the Toolkit binder, or other topic of interest to the group, to practice conversation skills. Keep in mind the following helpful hints:

- Try to listen more than you talk.
- Ask questions, especially questions that draw out more information.
- Give genuine compliments.
- Keep the conversation positive – talk about good things that have happened.

Depression

Facts and Tips

Depression can drain one's energy, hope, and drive, making it difficult to do what is needed to feel better. While overcoming depression isn't quick or easy, it is far from impossible. The key to recovery is to start small and build from there. Feeling better takes time and requires making positive choices each day and drawing on the support of others. Here are some facts to keep in mind:

Depression after a TBI may emerge immediately or several years after the injury. While a person may be emotionally stable early in the recovery process, as self-awareness improves or as the demands of everyday life increase, he or she may become depressed.

Depression is more than just feeling sad. After a brain injury, it is normal to feel sad about the injury and the resulting problems that you must cope with. However, depression is more than this. It involves a negative and persisting change in a person's mood and future outlook.

Depression can affect physical and cognitive well-being. Feelings of being hopeless, helpless, or worthless may cause rapid weight loss or gain, too little or too much sleep, problems concentrating, or a diminished interest in seeing friends and family.

Several things can make depression worse. These include stress, staying in bed all day, not getting enough exercise, and not taking medications as prescribed.

Here are some strategies that have been found to be helpful:

- **Actively participate in rehabilitation treatment.** Sessions with occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech and language pathologists, or vocational counselors may improve your ability to do things and ultimately improve your feelings of well-being.
- **Take care of your body.** Exercise and a good diet can help overcome symptoms of depression. Keeping out of bed during the day and getting outside for some sunlight and fresh air are simple ways to help care for your body and mind.
- **Learn ways to relax.** Take note of the positive things in your life and make a list of the skills and qualities that you value in yourself. Deep-breathing techniques, massages, meditation, and listening to relaxation tapes are all ways to help keep calm. Try to do at least one calming activity each day.
- **Talking with a professional is an important step.** Letting a professional help with the more difficult emotional problems can help improve your mood as well as your relationships with others. Seek professional help if depression gets in the way of caring for yourself or your family, you wish you were no longer alive, or you are thinking about hurting yourself or committing suicide.
- **Take medications as they are prescribed.** If you have depression, medicine prescribed by your doctor may help improve your mood. Talk to your doctor if you don't think your medicine for depression is working – adjustments may be needed. Don't make changes on your own— suddenly stopping or increasing your medication can make things worse.

Depression

Tips for Caregivers

- **Take care of yourself.** Taking time to meet your own needs will help you cope with the emotional challenges of the TBI survivor. Doing activities you find relaxing, even for a short time, can be helpful in keeping your life balanced. Allow yourself to take breaks from care-giving. Let your family and friends help you when needed. Look for classes and caregiver support groups where you can learn more about effective problem-solving and coping strategies needed for care-giving.
- **Help the TBI survivor develop healthful habits.** Encouraging the TBI survivor to get up and go to bed at reasonable times, limit naps, eat healthy foods, and get outside for some sunlight and fresh air can help promote a more positive frame of mind. Monitoring alcohol and smoking intake can help prevent unhealthy coping strategies. Helping the TBI survivor take the correct dose of medications at the right times will maximize their benefits.
- **Implement relaxation strategies.** Deep-breathing techniques, massages, meditation, and listening to relaxation tapes can help a person calm down, reduce stress, and feel better overall.
- **Consider professional help.** Letting a professional help with the more difficult emotional problems can help maintain or improve your relationship with the TBI survivor and prevent you from becoming the therapist. Don't hesitate to ask the physician for a psychotherapy referral.

Depression

Discussion Questions

Purpose of discussion questions: These questions are designed to start discussion among group members about some common areas of difficulty with depression and about different strategies group members can use to help them function more effectively.

Tips for leading a discussion:

To plan for the discussion, choose the questions that you think would be most appropriate for your group. Be flexible during the discussion and let group members talk about what is most important to them.

Take rough notes during the discussion to keep track of key points. You might want to have someone else take notes for you.

If the discussion gets off-topic, you can re-ask the question to gently remind the group of the topic.

To end the discussion, ask for any final comments and briefly summarize what was discussed.

Question:

What would you say is the difference between feeling sad or unhappy and being depressed?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Sadness is a temporary feeling. Depression can last for several weeks, months, or even years.*
- *A sad person may feel bad, but will continue to cope with living. A person with clinical depression may feel overwhelmed and hopeless.*

Question:

What makes depression worse?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Not getting enough exercise*
- *Not taking medication(s) as prescribed*
- *Limiting activity*

Question:

What effect could depression have on someone's life?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Have difficulty finding pleasure in life*
- *Low self-esteem*
- *Becoming isolated from family and friends*
- *Lower chances of getting a job*

Question:

What things could you do (or do you do) to feel better if you were depressed?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Watch a funny movie*
- *Spend time with family and friends*
- *Take a walk*
- *Do something special for yourself*
- *Set a goal for doing a chore, task, or project and then accomplish it*

Depression

Group Activity

“Taking Charge”

Purpose of activity: This activity is designed to help group members practice skills in the area of depression. Follow these steps to help the group identify factors that can make depression worse and those that can make it better.

Tips for leading this activity:

Encourage the group to take notes while the stories are being read so that they can keep track of key points.

If needed, re-read the stories to give the clearest picture possible.

To end the activity, ask for any final comments and briefly summarize what was discussed.

Directions:

Let the group know that they will be asked to identify some of the factors that affect depression from the sample stories that you'll be reading. Encourage them to keep two questions in mind:

- Is the person acting in ways to make depression better or worse?
- What does the person do to improve or worsen depression?

STORY 1: Months after his accident, Mark was having difficulty with performing daily chores. He began telling himself that he was a failure and that he would never be successful at anything. He started avoiding his friends and spending more time alone in his dark room, thinking that no one liked him or wanted to spend time with him. He constantly felt sad, gloomy, and tired and rarely left his apartment. He spent most days alone, unhappy, and discouraged.

Discuss what actions served to make Mark more depressed.

STORY 2: Months after his accident, Mark began attending a support group. He worked with the group to change his negative thoughts, and to replace those thoughts with more positive statements. Because Mark had enjoyed watching baseball games with friends in the past, he started watching baseball with his friends again. As Mark became more socially active and spent less time thinking negative thoughts, he found that he was becoming more energetic and that his mood was improving.

Discuss what actions served to make Mark less depressed.

Fatigue

Facts and Tips

Fatigue is the feeling of an overwhelming lack of energy. It can be described as tiredness, weariness, or listlessness. Fatigue may change the way a person does things or limit the number of things a person can do each day. Fatigue can make even basic activities hard to accomplish.

Fatigue is very common after a TBI. While fatigue usually decreases over time, it can remain a persistent problem. While the exact reasons for fatigue are not always known, they may be related to the healing process of the brain. This healing can take energy. Also, the brain is also working harder than it did before the TBI to process information. This mental processing can make a person feel tired. Finally, people may not be as physically active after a TBI which can cause deconditioning and make daily activities feel more tiring.

There are three main types of fatigue: physical, mental, and psychological.

Physical fatigue is often connected with muscle weakness or deconditioning. Individuals may get more tired doing physical activities they could do before their TBI, such as working around the house or yard. It can also be a result of having to deal with a physical injury.

Mental fatigue is related to difficulty with thinking or concentrating. People with TBI often have to concentrate harder on tasks than before the injury. This can lead to feeling more tired.

Psychological fatigue comes with depression and anxiety. Stress can make this type of fatigue worse. Many people find this fatigue to be hardest in the mornings.

Here are some suggestions that others have found helpful:

- **Prioritize tasks.** Decide on the order of doing things according to their importance and the energy levels they require. By prioritizing tasks, a person can focus on more important tasks when their energy levels are higher and they can avoid unexpected fatigue. For example, if energy levels are best in the mornings, try grocery shopping or balancing the checkbook earlier in the day.
- **Pace yourself.** Notice how much energy it takes to get a task done and how fast you can work without getting tired. Pacing can involve taking more short rest breaks instead of one long break. For example, instead of vacuuming the whole house at once, you may try vacuuming one room at a time with rest breaks between each room.
- **Take care of your body.** Exercising regularly, eating a well-balanced diet, and avoiding alcohol can all help reduce overall fatigue. Doing relaxing activities during the day, like listening to calming music, can also help reduce stress and fatigue.
- **Practice good sleep habits.** To help get a full night's sleep, try waking at the same time every day and avoid napping during the day, if possible. If a nap is necessary, limit to less than one hour. Reduce caffeine intake, especially in the evening. Avoid exercising too late in the day or in the evening.
- **Organize your work areas.** Organizing work areas can help you locate things quickly without expending energy searching. Work areas are anywhere tasks take place. They can be the kitchen when preparing a meal, the bathroom while getting ready in the morning, or even the laundry room when washing clothes. By storing frequently used items within easy reach, tasks can be simplified and fatigue reduced.

Fatigue

Tips for Caregivers

Fatigue is a common problem for many individuals with a TBI. While fatigue often decreases over time, it can remain a persistent problem. Knowing that fatigue is an issue can help in understanding potentially difficult interactions with a person with a TBI. Here are some suggestions that may help.

- **Understand the reasons for fatigue.** The brain of a TBI survivor is working harder to process information than it did before the injury. This extra effort can deplete energy and cause an individual to become tired from activities that may seem minor to other people, like reading a magazine or spending time in a crowded mall. A person with a TBI may need more time to rest after busy situations or lots of information.
- **Fatigue can be physical.** This is often associated with muscle weakness or injuries. Activity and strengthening will help with this type of fatigue. Fatigue should be discussed with the physician or health care provider to make sure there is not an underlying medical cause other than a brain injury.
- **Fatigue can be depression.** In some cases, a person's tiredness is the result of stress, anxiety, or depression. If you suspect depression, you should encourage a consultation with a professional for a formal assessment.
- **Fatigue can affect emotions.** Anyone can become irritable or angry when they haven't had enough rest. This can be doubly true for a TBI survivor. When an individual is becoming difficult or unreasonable, pause and consider the impact of their energy levels.
- **Encourage healthy sleep patterns.** Sleep habits can change dramatically after an injury. Try to remind the TBI survivor that a short nap (less than an hour) is preferable over sleeping for long periods of time during the day. Resting during the day can also mean taking a mental

break, like listening to calming music. Also, if you live with a TBI survivor, respect his or her need for quiet time if they are trying to sleep.

- **Encourage regular exercise and a healthy diet.** Studies show that regular exercise and a healthy diet will help decrease fatigue. This can help with physical tiredness, mental, and emotional fatigue.
- **Offer to take on tasks that may be too challenging.** This can be mowing the lawn or helping with the monthly budget. However, don't assume help will always be appreciated or needed. Some people may be happy with assistance. Others may resent help if they can't see any problem or believe they will lose their independence.
- **Mornings can be the best.** TBI survivors often find the morning a time of peak energy. Recognize that by afternoon, the individual may be running out of steam and unable to cope or renew energy as well as they could before. Going grocery shopping or balancing the checkbook may work better in the morning, with the afternoon open for a rest with a short nap or listening to music.
- **Take care of yourself.** It can be difficult, but it will be beneficial to find time for your own rest and renewal as a caregiver. Going for a walk, calling a friend to talk, practicing a favorite hobby or craft, listening to music you like, or keeping up a regular exercise routine are activities that other caregivers have found helpful.

Fatigue

Discussion Questions

Purpose of discussion questions: These questions are designed to start discussion among group members about some common areas of difficulty with fatigue and about different strategies group members use to help them function more effectively.

Tips for leading a discussion:

To plan for the discussion, choose the questions that you think would be most appropriate for your group. Be flexible during the discussion and let group members talk about what is most important to them.

Take rough notes during the discussion to keep track of key points. You might want to have someone else take notes for you.

If the discussion gets off-topic, you can re-ask the question to gently remind the group of the topic.

To end the discussion, ask for any final comments and briefly summarize what was discussed.

Question:

What strategies do people use if they get exhausted during the day?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Taking a short nap, 15 to 30 minutes*
- *Going to a quiet space and just resting*
- *Avoid sugary junk food; this will just make you more tired*
- *Exercise during the day can help build up stamina*

Question:

What do people think the benefits of exercising are for someone with a TBI?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Exercise can help improve sleep at night.*
- *Exercise may give more energy during the day and help with overall fatigue.*
- *Exercise circulates oxygen to the brain and can help people think more clearly.*
- *Exercise can help improve your mood.*

Questions:

How often do people in the group exercise each day?

How often do you exercise each week?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Each person will have their own personal routine for exercise. What is too much for one person may not be enough for another. But what is important is that everyone tries to get some exercise each week.*

Questions:

What are some suggestions for getting exercise?

Does anyone have suggestions for some low cost options for exercise?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Walking; you just need a good pair of shoes.*
- *YMCAs have financial assistance for people in need.*
- *Community centers can be low cost; check phone book listings.*

Question:

Does anyone have suggestions for getting motivated to exercise?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Work out with other people. They can help keep you motivated.*
- *Join an exercise group or club.*

Question:

Does anyone have strategies to deal with mental fatigue? This is the type of fatigue that comes when we feel like we can't concentrate or think straight.

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Give yourself short breaks – set a timer and take 5 minutes to give your brain a rest and don't do anything.*
- *Remember to breathe – set a timer and take 2 minutes to breathe slow and easy. Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. Getting oxygen into the body can help with fatigue.*
- *Get away from crowded or noisy areas to give your mind a break.*

Fatigue

Group Activity

“Deep Breathing”

Purpose of activity: This activity is designed to help group members practice a breathing method that can help reduce fatigue brought on by stress.

Tips for leading this activity:

It's best to have people breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth during this exercise.

A good way to describe this is: “Breathe in through the nose, like you're smelling a rose. Blow out through the mouth, like you're blowing out a candle.”

Count out loud for everyone, and ask them to count along with you. It should go like this...Breathe in through the nose, blow out through the mouth, one... breathe in through the nose, blow out through the mouth, two...and so on until you reach ten.

Read the following out loud to the group:

Stress can lead to fatigue. If you are exerting too much energy worrying about things, relaxation can help. A simple way to relax is with deep breathing exercises. Just a few minutes of deep breathing can help relieve tension or regain energy.

The key to deep breathing is to breathe deeply from the abdomen, getting fresh air into your lungs. When you take deep breaths from the abdomen, rather than shallow breaths from your upper chest, you inhale more oxygen. The more oxygen you get, the less tense, short of breath, and anxious you feel.

As you begin to feel relaxed from deep breathing, you may feel a heaviness, warmth, or tingling in your hands and feet. These sensations will be short-lived and go away once you are engaged in other activities.

If you really enjoy this breathing exercise, you may lose track of time. It may be a good idea to use an egg timer or set the timer on a watch for a few minutes to remind you to continue with your day.

Let's try the exercise together:

1. Sit comfortably in a chair with your back straight. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Each breath out should be about twice as long as each breath in.
2. Breathe in through your nose. The hand on your stomach should move out. The hand on your chest should move very little.
3. Breathe out through your mouth, pushing air out while tightening your stomach muscles. The hand on your stomach should move in, but your other hand should move very little.
4. Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to breathe enough so that your lower abdomen goes out and in.
5. It is important to pause a few seconds between each breath out and the new breath in. If you are feeling light-headed, you may be breathing too fast or too shallow. Take a moment and begin again with slower, deep breaths.
6. Remember, each breath out should take twice as long as the breath in.

Try this deep breathing exercise for the count of 10.

End the exercise by asking everyone how this made them feel and if they would use this technique again on their own.

Initiation, Planning, and Organization

Facts and Tips

Initiation, planning, and organization are skills that allow people to set a goal, determine what steps have to be taken to accomplish that goal, and take action. These skills are necessary for many everyday activities, from getting ready in the morning, to making a meal, to planning a birthday party. Initiation, planning, and organization are difficult for many people with TBI and can make it harder to get things done.

Initiation is the ability to start doing an activity.

Planning is the ability to decide how to do a task.

Organization is the ability to put the steps of a task in the correct order.

Many daily life activities can be affected by difficulties in initiation, planning and organization. Many people with a brain injury have a hard time starting or finishing things they set out to do. They may have a hard time with tasks that used to be easy, such as getting dressed or finishing a work assignment. TBI survivors may have a hard time trying new ways of doing things. Multi-tasking may no longer be possible, and individuals may have to do only one thing at a time. Problems with initiation, planning, and organization may also cause TBI survivors to stop doing favorite activities.

Here are some suggestions that others have found helpful:

- **Use organizers to keep track of information.** Put all important information in one organizer or daily planner. Write down all appointments, your daily schedule, shopping lists, and other important information. Use a pill organizer to help manage your medications.
- **Use a to-do list.** Every day you should write a short “to-do” list of what you’ll be able to do that day. Check off items as you complete them.
- **Follow a regular routine.** This will help you get everything done. Set a specific day for each of your household chores. For instance, it is more likely that you will remember to pay bills if you do it every Thursday. Set a specific time each day to focus on planning and organizing for the next day. Look at your schedule often during the day, so you don’t forget to do things. Use a timer or alarm to remind you of important things to do in the day, such as starting to cook a meal. Make a place for everything in your home and label the location so you know where everything goes.

- **Minimize distractions when focusing on a task.** Concentrate on one activity at a time. For example, when you are cooking, turn off the TV or radio, so you don't get distracted. When you are doing a task, take out only the things you are going to use. Put away everything else. Clutter can be very distracting and can cause a person to get side-tracked from the task that he or she started out to do.
- **Maximize your abilities.** There are some things you can do to increase your ability to focus, think more clearly, and get tasks done. Try to get enough sleep each night and take breaks during the day. Work on decreasing your stress level before focusing on a goal. Set a reasonable number of goals for yourself. Finally, do things that require the most initiation, planning, or organization at the time of day when you are the least tired (often in the morning).
- **Break down complex tasks into small steps.** This is sometimes called the "divide and conquer" approach. Making a list of the steps that need to be done makes a challenging job easier to accomplish.

Initiation, Planning, and Organization

Tips for Caregivers

It can be very difficult for people with TBI to initiate, plan and organize. Here are some ways you can help.

- **Take care of yourself.** If you are well-rested and calm, you can do a better job taking care of the TBI survivor and feel less frustrated and upset.
- **Help the individual with TBI develop and maintain an organizational system.** An organizer is a great tool. Buy an organizer that includes a monthly planner and space for a to-do list, notes, and useful information, such as phone numbers. It may take some time for him or her to start using it automatically.
- **Help the TBI survivor establish a routine.** This routine may include weekly activities, as well as a daily schedule. It may help to post these routines and schedules in a prominent location where the individual is sure to see them. It may help to check off tasks that have been completed.
- **Help the TBI survivor stay on track by minimizing distractions.** This may include putting away unnecessary tools or materials and turning off the radio or TV.
- **Help organize activities so the TBI survivor is only doing one thing at a time.** Multitasking can be very difficult for people with brain injuries.
- **Give extra help when it's needed to start tasks.** Many individuals with TBI may seem to be lazy or uncooperative, but actually, they need extra help to start activities. Try helping them get started on a task before letting them continue on their own. Oftentimes, simple cues given in a calm voice and/or with a light touch work best. For example, saying, "Let's go eat dinner." while taking the person's hand might be enough to get him/her standing up and moving toward the table.

Initiation, Planning, and Organization

Discussion Questions

Purpose of discussion questions: These questions are designed to start discussion among group members about some common areas of difficulty with initiation, planning, and organization and about different strategies group members use to help them function more effectively.

Tips for leading a discussion:

To plan for the discussion, choose the questions that you think would be most appropriate for your group. Be flexible during the discussion and let group members talk about what is most important to them.

Take rough notes during the discussion to keep track of key points. You might want to have someone else take notes for you.

If the discussion gets off-topic, you can re-ask the question to gently remind the group of the topic.

To end the discussion, ask for any final comments and briefly summarize what was discussed.

Questions:

Has anyone had a problem with initiation (the ability to start doing something)?

When do you have difficulty getting started doing something?

Does anyone want to share something that helped with this?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Having someone remind me.*
- *Setting a timer.*
- *Setting up a routine (example: I know I need to vacuum on Mondays).*

Questions:

Has anyone had trouble with planning something you wanted to do?

What was it and what kind of problems did you have?

What is difficult about planning?

What have you tried that has helped you plan?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Do difficult or complicated planning in the morning when I'm feeling well-rested.*
- *Break down complicated tasks into small steps.*
- *Just focus on planning one thing at a time.*

Questions:

Does anyone have trouble with getting and staying organized? This can include organizing a space or putting the steps of a task in the correct order.

What is challenging about organization?

What makes it worse?

What helps you get and stay organized?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Check my organizer every day.*
- *Getting rid of clutter.*
- *Organizing my front hallway with everything I need to take with me when I leave each day.*

Initiation, Planning, and Organization

Group Activity

“Self Reflection”

Purpose of activity: This group activity is designed to help group members think about how they initiate, plan, and organize.

Tips for leading this activity:

This activity requires some high-level skills, such as reading, writing, and thinking about mental processing. This activity can be simplified by reading the questions to the group and discussing answers.

Directions:

Give a copy of the worksheet to each group member. Group members can select answers that best describe them. This worksheet will help group members remember what they would like to say during discussion. This may help them listen better while other members are sharing.

Discuss what group members wrote. Group members can share their answers with the group and discuss problems they have and strategies on how to deal with these problems.

Self Reflection Worksheet

Mark the statements that apply to you

What problems do I have initiating, planning, and organizing?

- Difficulty getting started
- Difficulty making and/or sticking to plans
- Difficulty organizing activities
- Difficulty getting everything done
- Other problems: _____

What makes these problems worse?

- Fatigue
- Trying to do too many things at once
- Noise or other distractions, such as people or clutter
- Trouble finding things
- Too many things to do
- Other things that make this hard: _____

What can I do to help myself?

- Plan to start activities during the time of day I'm least tired:
Circle one: morning afternoon evening
- Do one activity at a time
- Get rid of clutter
- Turn off the TV or radio when I'm trying to think
- Follow a regular routine of when I do things each day
- Put everything I need in one place for a task I do often
- Use a weekly planner to organize activities/chores
- Other things I can do to help myself: _____

Circle one thing you could start doing tomorrow.

Initiation, Planning, and Organization

Group Activity

“Event Planning”

Purpose of group activity: This group activity is designed to help group members practice skills in the area of initiation, planning, and organization.

Directions:

Follow these steps to help the group plan an event to do together. Use the Event Planning Sheet to help organize the information so when the planning session is done, everyone in the group can see what things need to be accomplished in order for the event to take place.

Assign someone (or ask for a volunteer) to fill out the planning sheet during the discussion. Additional copies of the final plans may be filled out afterward for individuals to take home.

Ask for suggestions for events or outings the group might enjoy doing together. Some examples might be a birthday or holiday party, going out to lunch, going miniature golfing, going to a museum or the zoo, or attending a sporting event.

Decide, as a group, which event to make a plan for. A simple “show-of hands” vote may be enough to determine the most popular event. If there are several good ideas, asking questions like “Would this cost too much money?” or “How easy would it be for us to get there?” might help the group make a decision.

Next, decide when to hold the event. The group may want to use the next scheduled meeting or plan another time to hold the event. To avoid scheduling conflicts, ask group members to consider other plans they have already made.

Decide where to hold the event and how each person will get there. Group members may need to arrange transportation with a friend or family member, or they may need help arranging public transportation.

Make a list of the supplies needed and decide how much money is needed. Decide whether group funds will be spent or if each group member will contribute his/her own money.

Next, the group should decide on steps that need to be taken in order to achieve the final result. Review the steps after they are all written and make sure there aren't any steps missing and that they are in the correct order. With each step, come up with a date the task needs to be completed by and assign one or two people to be in charge of completing the task. It may help to have the people in charge of the task report to someone else, such as the facilitator, when the task is completed. Assign two people if there is a concern about one person having difficulty completing a task.

To help group members follow through on completing their assigned tasks, make sure each member has written down what they need to do.

Reflection questions: After completing the planning, the facilitator can ask these questions to help the group discuss how the planning went, and how they can use similar strategies to plan other events.

What other kinds of activities can this be used for? Any examples?

What other activities would you want to plan?

You can hand out blank copies of the event planning worksheet for group members to use at home.

Event planning sheet

What is the event?

Where is the event and how will we get there?

When do we want to do it?

What supplies do we need?

How much money can we spend?

What steps do we need to take?

| What we need to do | When we need to do it | Who will do it? | √ if done |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| 1. | | | |
| 2. | | | |
| 3. | | | |
| 4. | | | |
| 5. | | | |
| 6. | | | |
| 7. | | | |
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| 13. | | | |
| 14. | | | |
| 15. | | | |

Managing Frustration and Irritability

Facts and Tips

After a brain injury, it is very common to have difficulty controlling emotions such as frustration and irritability. This is because the frontal lobe of the brain, the part of the brain responsible for controlling impulses, is often damaged in a TBI, even milder ones.

As a result, a brain injury survivor can become less able to tolerate even mildly irritating events or people. The TBI survivor may overreact, saying or doing things that in the past he or she might have thought, but would have kept to him or herself. The individual may say or do things that cause problems at work or hurt the feelings of their friends or family members.

In addition, sometimes the person with a brain injury isn't aware of these problems and may not realize that the behavior is inappropriate. This can get in the way of recovery and damage relationships.

Here are some suggestions that others have found useful.

- **Remember why controlling frustration and irritability is important.** The consequences of being irritable or getting angry may be more problems. Other people may also become irritable or angry and the situation may escalate. Sometimes feelings get hurt. Family and friends may avoid the individual or be very careful about what they say. The consequences can be more severe if an employee gets angry with their boss. In that case, the employee may lose their job. Not being able to control emotions effectively may interfere with independent living.
- **Learn to recognize the early signs of anger.** Signs can be different for different people, but making a fist, feeling tightness in the shoulders and neck, or clenching the jaw are common ones. There may be certain thoughts or behaviors that can be recognized as a sign to step away from the situation. Writing down these signs can be helpful. It is often easier to calm down **before** emotions get really intense.

- **Try to schedule positive events or activities into the day.** This could be doing a routine task which gives a sense of accomplishment or doing something enjoyable like watching a humorous movie. Positive events make irritating events easier to tolerate.
- **Become aware of triggers – events and types of situations that set off frustration and irritability.** Perhaps it is tiredness at the end of the day, being criticized, or are getting stuck on a problem. Family members might have some insights into this.
- **Take a deep breath and count to 10.** Sometimes taking some time to calm down can help. Remember that the other person is usually doing their best. In a very emotionally intense situation it may be necessary to **leave the situation for 15 minutes**, until emotions have really calmed down and thought can be put into what to say.
- **Try the Stop-Think Technique.**
Notice irritated or frustrated thoughts running through your mind. Then:
 - Stop! Think before reacting to the situation. Are the thoughts accurate or helpful?
 - Challenge the inaccurate or unhelpful thoughts. Are they really true?
 - Create a new thought.
- **Recognize and reward successes.** It is important to acknowledge success, especially when it is as difficult as controlling frustration and irritability is. Changing patterns of behavior is difficult, but it becomes easier each time.

Managing Frustration and Irritability

Tips for Caregivers

It is common for a person who has had a TBI to experience increased frustration and irritability and become angry more easily. This can be very difficult for the caregiver to deal with. Here are some tips that can help.

- **Take care of yourself.** It can be difficult, but you need to find time to do relaxing things for yourself. Some ideas are to go for a walk, call a friend, practice a favorite hobby or craft, or listen to music.
- **Remember not to take it personally.** The survivor might not yet be able to acknowledge all that you do. Tell yourself that it is the injury talking, not the individual. Recognize all that you do for the survivor, whether they appreciate it or not. You might want to talk to other family members or friends to get support and encouragement for your role as a caregiver.
- **Set up a well-organized daily routine.** Positive routines can go a long way towards smoothing out everyday life. If the survivor knows what is going to happen and when it will happen, he or she will have less uncertainty and confusion. This will make daily life easier, especially during periods of transition from one activity to another. This is one of the reasons to encourage the use of a calendar or planner for scheduling everyday activities.
- **Give the brain injury survivor choices in his or her life.** We all need to feel in control of our lives, at least part of the time. Someone who is recovering from a brain injury may have gone from being an independent adult who makes their own choices to having much of their day planned for them. Remind yourself of which things they have to do and let them decide about the others.
- **Be aware of the individual's stress level and help them be aware of it, too.** If the survivor starts feeling stressed, he or she may be more likely to become irritable or frustrated. Suggesting a quiet or calming activity may be helpful.

- **Recognize that too much stimulation and activity may increase irritability and frustration.** Noisy and visually stimulating environments can make a person with a brain injury irritable. What used to be an acceptable level of activity may now be too much. Fatigue will decrease toleration of activity. It may be necessary to cut out some activities.
- **Try to limit the individual's frustration at not being able to do what he or she used to be able to.** Help the survivor set reasonable goals and encourage them to complete those goals. Provide help when needed, before frustration occurs. Remember that he or she has less tolerance for frustration than before.
- **Provide him or her with interesting activities that are not too tiring.** These could include outings to a local hardware store at a time of day when it is not busy. A routine, but essential, task such as folding laundry or taking care of a pet can also be rewarding.
- **Do not reward behavior that you do not want to see repeated.** If getting angry gets the survivor what he or she wants, including attention and increased interaction with others, the behavior of getting angry will happen again. Keep in mind that negative attention is often preferred by people to no attention at all.
- **Learn to recognize when the person with TBI is getting angry.** You may need to help him or her realize they are getting angry. Sometimes, people can use a pre-arranged and rehearsed humorous code word or sentence that breaks the tension. If it is safe, perhaps you can leave the room and let them calm down. Remember to stay calm yourself.
- **Talk to a professional if you need to.** If the survivor's anger is worrisome, talk to their physician. Therapy and/or medications may help.

Managing Frustration and Irritability

Discussion Questions

Purpose of discussion questions: These questions are designed to start discussion among group members about some common areas of difficulty with frustration and irritability and about different strategies group members use to help them function more effectively.

Tips for leading a discussion:

To plan for the discussion, choose the questions that you think would be most appropriate for your group. Be flexible during the discussion and let group members talk about what is most important to them.

Take rough notes during the discussion to keep track of key points. You might want to have someone else help with taking notes for you.

If the discussion gets off-topic, you can re-ask the question gently to remind the group of the topic.

To end the discussion, ask for any final comments and briefly summarize what was discussed.

Question:

Are there certain situations or events that tend to make you frustrated or irritated?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Being stuck in bad traffic*
- *Dealing with unpleasant people*
- *Family members telling you what to do*

Question:

What are techniques have you used to deal with this problem?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Talking to a friend*
- *Going for a walk*
- *Listening to music*

Question:

What are some of the negative consequences of getting irritated or frustrated?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Other people getting angry*
- *Losing friends*
- *Getting arrested*

Managing Frustration and Irritability

Group Activity

“Dealing with Difficult Situations”

Purpose of activities: This group activity is designed to help group members practice skills in the area of managing frustration and irritability.

Tips for leading this activity:

Ask everyone if they would like to be involved, but if a group member is uncomfortable, they can quietly wait for the next topic.

Try to give everyone a chance to participate. Ask members with a lot to say to be respectful of others who need time to talk.

Directions:

Recognize challenging situations. Have each person in the group come up with a situation that has made them irritated or frustrated.

Some examples include:

- *Not being able to do something you used to be able to do.*
- *Having a disagreement with a family member.*
- *Not being able to find something important.*

What is similar about these situations? Could any of them have been prevented?

Directions:

Brainstorm strategies. Ask the group to come up with ways to deal with irritating or frustrating situations.

Some examples include:

- *Avoid the situation altogether, or leave and give yourself time to think of a solution.*
- *Talk to a friend or family member.*
- *Practice relaxing in order to feel less stressed about the situation.*

Directions:

Decrease stress. Ask each person in the group to come up with one thing that is relaxing and helpful when they are feeling stressed.

Some examples include:

- *Walking in your favorite neighborhood.*
- *Listening to soothing music.*
- *Deep breathing for 3 minutes.*
- *Talking to a friend.*
- *Remind yourself of one success you've had in the past day.*

Managing Frustration and Irritability

Group Activity

“Relaxation”

Relaxation can be helpful in dealing with frustration and irritability. While it seems that everyone should know how to relax, practice makes it more effective. Have the group do a relaxation exercise.

Directions:

Read the following out loud.

As you're sitting quietly, recall quietly, in your mind, the most relaxing thought you can.

Perhaps it's a favorite place, a room in your house, a vacation spot.

Or it might be a person with whom you feel at peace, or some scene - a meadow, the beach, whatever works for you.

Take a few seconds to get that in mind.....

Wait a few seconds before continuing to read:

Now, see or imagine that in your mind. Feel the good feelings you have when you are in that place or with that person.

Just let that take over your whole awareness...If your thoughts wander, just take them gently back to that peaceful, relaxing place.

Wait a minute or two for quiet reflection and then read:

Everyone, slowly bring yourself back to the present.

Take a deep breath and enjoy the feeling of being relaxed.

Thank you for participating.

Memory

Facts and Tips

Memory problems are very common following a brain injury. Memory is a complex function that involves taking in, keeping, and retrieving information. A brain injury can affect any of these areas and can make it hard to learn and remember things. One typical memory problem after TBI is having difficulty recalling recent events, such as what was said in a recent conversation. Many individuals with TBI also have problems remembering future events, such as errands that need to be done or future appointments that need to be met.

In addition, memory can be influenced by many factors, including attention and mood. For example, a decreased attention span can reduce the amount of information a person takes in. Even if the memory functions are working fine, only some of the presented information will be remembered.

For many people with TBI, learning ways to compensate for memory problems can help them manage their lives more effectively.

Here are some strategies that have been found to be helpful.

- **Write it down.** Many people who have had a brain injury use planners and write notes to help remember important information. One strategy is to use an easily visible wall calendar as well as a daily organizer or planner. Put all important information in one planner. This can include all appointments, your daily schedule, shopping lists, phone numbers, and other important information. A planner that is small enough to carry at all times is best, so that if you make an appointment or think of something you need to do, you can write it down immediately. This planner should be checked several times a day. If writing is difficult, a small voice recorder can be used to make notes to yourself and listen to later.

- **Let a device or person help you remember when to do things.** Use a timer or your cell phone to remind you when you need to do things, like taking your medicine. Setting up your bank account so that your bills are paid automatically can also be helpful. If you have an important appointment that you don't want to be late for, have a friend or family member call you ahead of time.
- **Follow a routine.** A routine is important in making sure that recurring tasks, such as laundry, get done. Always put things in the same place (like your keys on the same hook or your wallet on the same dresser). Keep a to-do list for each day and mark off completed tasks so you don't repeat tasks by mistake.
- **Experiment with new ways of learning.** Use specific strategies to compensate for decreased memory, such as:
 - Breaking down new information into smaller parts.
 - Thinking of ways to connect new and old information.
 - Repeating important information.
- **Be aware of factors that can increase your ability to remember.** Get a good night's rest so that fatigue does not lessen your ability to pay attention and remember. Plan important or demanding activities during the times of day when you are at your best. Playing word or puzzle games can sometimes help improve thinking skills.

Memory

Tips for Caregivers

Memory problems are very common following a traumatic brain injury and can be frustrating for the caregiver as well as the survivor. Here are some things that others have found useful.

- **Take care of yourself.** When possible, take breaks and do something enjoyable or relaxing. If you are meeting your own needs, you will be able to cope better with the memory challenges of the TBI survivor.
- **Remember that inconsistency is common with memory problems.** A TBI survivor may remember well at some times, but not at others. If it seems that the survivor's memory was better in the hospital, it may be because the problems were less obvious in a more simple, supportive environment versus a more challenging setting like the home.
- **Don't argue about things the survivor can't remember.** It may be most helpful to acknowledge that your stories differ, state your own recollection, and then move on.
- **Minimize situations that can make memory problems worse.** These include lack of sleep and fatigue, poor health or illness, side effects of some medications, stress, and strong emotions such as anxiety, depression, and anger. Be aware of these and be prepared to offer extra assistance when important information is given to the survivor when they are tired, stressed, or upset.
- **You can also help the TBI survivor with memory problems by:**
 - Not expecting him or her to remember as much as before.
 - Helping with using reminders such as calendars.
 - Helping set and follow a daily routine.
 - Helping break down new information into smaller parts.

Memory

Discussion Questions

Purpose of discussion questions: These questions are designed to start discussion among group members about some common areas of difficulty with memory and about different strategies they might be able to use to help them function more effectively.

Tips for leading a discussion:

To plan for the discussion, choose the questions that you think would be most appropriate for your group. Be flexible during the discussion and let group members talk about what is most important to them.

Take rough notes during the discussion to keep track of key points. You might want to have someone else take notes for you.

If the discussion gets off-topic, you can re-ask the question to gently remind the group of the topic.

To end the discussion, ask for any final comments and briefly summarize what was discussed.

Question:

Does anyone here have some sort of memory problem? Can you describe it?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Problems remembering things you used to know*
- *Problems remembering recent events or future appointments*

Question:

Are there specific times or situations when your memory is better?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *In a quiet, structured environment*
- *During certain times of the day (morning, noon, evening)*

Question:

What makes memory problems worse?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Being tired/sleepy*
- *Medication*
- *Stress*

Question:

What kinds of things could you do (or do you do) to make up for a memory problem?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Write things down (calendar, planner, notebook)*
- *Ask other people for help (telephone reminders)*

Question:

What would you want your family or friends to know about your memory problems?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *You remember better under certain conditions*
- *You are trying your best*

Memory

Group Activity

“Who Am I?”

Purpose of activity: This activity is designed to help group members practice skills in the area of memory. Follow these steps in order to help the group work on writing down important information that they might need later.

Tips for leading this activity:

Re-read the directions if needed to ensure clear understanding.

Prepare the identify cards in advance. Make sure everyone’s cards are in the same category (e.g., celebrities, athletes) for each trial.

This activity can also be changed so that only one person has an identity to be guessed by the group.

Directions:

Tape an identity card to each group member’s back. It is important that each person does not see what is written on the card they are wearing. The card, which can be easily read by other group members, reveals the identity (which can be a person, place, or thing) of the wearer.

Possible “identity” categories:

- Celebrities
- Athletes
- Musicians
- Movies
- Sports
- Foods
- Hobbies
- Vacation spots

Each person must discover the identity written on the card they're wearing by asking other group members "Yes or No" questions. Have them walk around and interact with one another in order for each member to try and figure out who (or what) they are.

Sample questions:

- "Am I a man?"
- "Am I a movie star?"
- "Did I star in the movie Titanic?"

Instruct people to take notes based on the answers other people give them. They can then use the information they've gathered to figure out what is written on the card they are wearing—their "identity".

When everyone has guessed their identify, discuss the benefits of writing down important information as a group. Ask each person how they organized their notes in order to remember the information they received and encourage note-writing for remembering information in the future.

Relationship Skills

Facts and Tips

Many people notice changes in relationships with friends and family after brain injury. Friends and family members might not call or visit as often as they used to. It may seem like they don't care anymore. Individuals with TBI may find it more difficult to relate to others. There may be increased stress in relationships with significant others and roles in relationships may change. Some people say or do things they would have thought were inappropriate before the TBI.

Successful relationships with friends and family members require skills that may have been damaged by TBI. These skills include listening skills, good judgment, and ability to behave appropriately in varying situations. Other challenges people with TBI face include decreased tolerance for frustration, socially inappropriate behavior or comments, and increased irritability.

Many people with TBI make mistakes during conversations with others. Common mistakes include not listening to others when they talk, talking too much about themselves, and saying things that hurt others' feelings.

TBI causes other problems that can make relationships challenging. Many people feel too tired to make an effort socially. Some people worry about making mistakes or feeling foolish and pull back from social situations. Many people feel frustrated and irritable more often which can cause social interactions to be less enjoyable.

Here are some suggestions that others have found helpful.

- **Be aware of how others are feeling.** Try asking yourself:
 - What effect could my actions have on my family and friends?
 - How do I treat other people?
 - Could I be pushing others away?

- **If you start to feel irritated or angry, leave the situation for a while to calm down.** Try breathing deeply and telling yourself, “Relax.” Pick a relaxing activity to do when you get upset, such as taking a walk, taking a shower, playing solitaire, or listening to soothing music.
- **Improve the relationships you have.** Think about what makes you feel good and do this for a friend or family member. You may offer to help them with a chore or task, compliment them, or ask them about their day. Make sure to listen, as well as talk, during conversations. Use memory strategies to remember birthdays, dates, and things your friends like. For example, write birthdays down on a calendar or in a day planner to help you remember.
- **Consider going to a professional to help you work through tough emotional problems.** This can help lighten relationships between you and your family and friends.
- **Work as a team with your partner or spouse.** Ask these questions when a problem arises:
 - What is our goal?
 - How do we reach it?
 - How can we work as partners toward this goal?
- **If you are feeling lonely, try new activities where you may meet new people.** Try joining a club in your area, such as a gardening club, day hiking club, or a gym. Look for classes offered in the community, such as dancing, cooking, or crafts. Limit the amount of time spent doing solitary activities such as watching TV. Make a point to greet people with a smile.

Relationship Skills

Tips for Caregivers

It can be very difficult for people with TBI to maintain healthy relationships. Here are some ways you can help.

- **Take care of yourself.** If you are well-rested and calm, you can do a better job taking care of the individual with TBI.
- **Consider seeking a professional to help the individual with TBI deal with some of the tough emotional issues.** Letting a professional help with some emotional problems and communication issues can help maintain a loving relationship and prevent you from turning into the therapist.
- **Consider using paid respite care or asking family and friends to help occasionally.** This can help if caregiving responsibilities are getting in the way of a good relationship.
- **If anger is an issue, help the person with TBI avoid situations that incite anger.** Help him/her learn to express anger in ways that aren't threatening or hurtful.
- **If you have a close personal relationship and verbal communication is difficult, think of other ways to convey your feelings.** Experiment with touch, eye contact, or facial expressions.
- **Work as a team with your partner or spouse.** When a problem arises, clarify a common goal and how you can work as partners towards making that happen.
- **Humor can be helpful in getting through difficult situations.** Gentle joking and laughing can help lighten the mood and ease difficult situations. Use your judgment and knowledge of the person with TBI to use humor appropriately.

Relationship Skills

Discussion Questions

Purpose of discussion questions: These questions are designed to start discussion among group members about some common areas of difficulty with relationship skills and about different strategies group members use to help them function more effectively.

Tips for leading a discussion:

To plan for the discussion, choose the questions that you think would be most appropriate for your group. Be flexible during the discussion and let group members talk about what is most important to them.

Take rough notes during the discussion to keep track of key points. You might want to have someone else take notes for you.

If the discussion gets off-topic, you can re-ask the question to gently remind the group of the topic.

To end the discussion, ask for any final comments and briefly summarize what was discussed.

Question:

What do you do that makes others happy?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Helping with household chores*
- *Giving people compliments*
- *Giving a friend a back rub after asking if they would like one.*

Question:

How have you met new people since your injury?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Joined a gardening club*
- *Volunteered at a food bank*
- *Started conversations with neighbors*

Question:

What is hard about meeting new people and how have you overcome these challenges?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *It's hard to remember names. One way to deal with that is to just joke about being bad with names and ask people to remind you. It helps to know that many people have a hard time remembering names.*
- *Knowing what to talk about. Spending more time listening than talking is a good way to get people to want to talk to you again.*

Question:

What is difficult about relationships with other people? What do you do to maintain friendships and relationships?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Sometimes, it's hard to engage other people when I'm feeling tired or sad. It can help to share feelings with close friends and let them know that I enjoy spending time with them.*
- *Friends don't call me as often as they used to. I made a list of friends who I'd like to see or talk to, and schedule times to call them. I ask them to help me think of activities we could do together.*

Relationship Skills

Group Activity

“Brainstorming”

Purpose of activities: These activities are designed to help group members generate ideas for activities to do for or with others that can improve relationships.

Tips for leading these activities:

Ask for a volunteer from the group to write down ideas generated by the group so you can focus on leading the activity.

To help group members feel comfortable giving ideas, all ideas should be accepted and written down. People can choose the ideas that will work best for them later.

To help group members maintain focus on the brainstorming topic, write it in large letters on a piece of paper and post it where everyone can see.

Directions:

Brainstorm ideas. Give the topic and explain that in brainstorming, all answers will be accepted. You may help people get started by giving some examples (included after each topic, below).

Review all ideas. After looking at all the ideas, group members can choose the ones that will work best for them, and record them on a sheet of paper to take home. Encourage members to think of specific people they can do these activities for or with.

Brainstorming Topics

Activities that make others feel good

Some examples include:

- *Doing dishes for my roommate.*
- *Complimenting my mother.*
- *Giving a back rub to my good friend.*

Fun activities to do with others

Some examples include:

- *Having tea with a friend.*
- *Putting together a puzzle or playing a board game with my child, niece, or nephew.*
- *Going for a walk in the park with my brother.*

Reflection questions: Ask these questions to help group members think about how they can use these activities in their everyday lives.

What are some activities that you think you can do?

Who will you do these activities with?

How do you think these doing these activities might improve your relationships?

Relationship Skills

Group Activity

“Giving Compliments”

Purpose of activity: This group activity is designed to help group members practice relationship skills.

Directions:

Each group member writes all other group members’ names on a piece of paper. After each name, each person writes a compliment.

To help members get started, the facilitator can give sample compliments to members of the group. Samples include, “I really like the color of your shirt,” or “You are a really good listener.”

Sharing compliments. When everybody has finished writing compliments, they can take turns sharing what they have written.

Reflection questions: Ask these questions to help group members think about how they can give compliments to their friends and family.

How did it feel to receive a compliment?

How can you give compliments to your friends and family?

Relationship Skills

Group Activity

“Fighting Fair”

Purpose of activity: This group activity is designed to help group members practice relationship skills. In this activity, group members can learn rules of effective disagreement by listening to the facilitator and another group member read the scripted argument and pointing out what they are doing right or wrong.

Tip for leading this activity:

When asking reflection questions, it may help group members if you post the three “rules for fighting fair” given below.

Directions: Introduce the rules to follow in an argument that can help people stay on topic and not damage relationships.

Rules for fighting fair:

- 1. Don't get personal (don't make the other person feel bad).**
- 2. Don't bring up past wrongdoings or disagreements.**
- 3. Listen before responding. Take time to think of what you want to say.**

Introduce the first argument by saying that the actors will be breaking the rules, and group members should look for mistakes. Have two group members read the script and act out the first argument. Afterward, ask group members to point out what the actors did wrong. Group members can suggest alternative ways of responding.

Introduce the second argument by telling the group that the actors will be trying to follow the rules. Have two group members read the script and act out the second argument. Ask group members to point out what the actors did correctly.

Argument #1:

Pat: Hey Chris, I noticed you didn't take the garbage out today. You really have been lazy lately.

Chris: What are you talking about?! You never take the garbage out. Every time I -

Pat: *(interrupting, yelling)* Well, you don't ever clean up around here! Look at this place. It's a huge mess. The kitchen is full of dirty dishes, the laundry -

Chris: *(interrupting, yelling)* Oh, be quiet. I can't talk to you any more!

Pat storms off

-END-

Group questions:

What did Chris and Pat do wrong?

What would you recommend they do instead?

Argument #2:

Pat: Hey Chris, I noticed you didn't take the garbage out today. Did you say you would try and get to that?

Chris: Oh, yeah. I meant to do that. You know, I feel like I am always taking out the garbage.

Pat: hmmm... *(pauses to think, and continues in a calm voice)*. You may be right. But I am usually the one doing laundry and most of the dishes. Do you think you could help out more with those things and I'll try to take out the garbage a little more often?

Chris: Sure, that sounds like a good idea.

–END–

Group questions:

Why was the second argument more effective or better?

Can you describe a time when you argued with someone and you or the other person ended up feeling bad?

Which of the “rules for fighting fair” do you think could help you argue more effectively or without hurting peoples' feelings?

Return to Work

Facts and Tips

Many persons want to return to work after experiencing a TBI, but often they have changed in ways that make returning to a job difficult. TBI survivors may or may not be aware of the challenges to their ability to return to a job.

Many employers do not understand what happens to the brain after a TBI. To a boss, if the employee looks fine on the outside, they must still be fine on the inside.

The same skills that an individual with a TBI needs for everyday living are often the same skills they will need to get back to a job. It is important that TBI survivors continue to develop awareness of their challenges and develop strategies to compensate.

Some examples of skills needed for returning to work:

- **Organizational skills.** Work activities that require organization include being on time for appointments, keeping a desk in order, and getting ready for work each day.
- **Communication skills.** Good performance at a job requires using polite language with a customer or with co-workers. Knowing when to listen and when it's time to talk is also important.
- **Memory.** This can involve remembering how to complete a task at work, a recent conversation just 30 minutes ago, or just everyday information.
- **Problem solving.** This can include knowing how to find a solution when someone is not around to ask.
- **Energy levels.** Knowing when to rest is essential for good job performance.
- **Managing emotions.** At work it's important to know when and where it's appropriate to release anger or sadness.

- **Attention span.** This can mean keeping focused on a task for 20 minutes, 60 minutes, or even longer.
- **Changes.** Even routine jobs may have changes that take place and having strategies to adapt are important.

Here are some suggestions that others have found helpful.

- **Get an early start.** If you want to work again, it's good to start planning about how to return. The sooner your planning begins, the better – even though it may be a long process, often a year or two.
- **Determine your strengths and weaknesses.** A great start for returning to work is taking a good look at your strengths and weaknesses. Talking out loud with someone who you trust is a great way to find strengths that may not be obvious at first. Identifying weaknesses is the first step to turning them around into strengths.
- **Understand your motivation to return to work.** Is there a need for independence or financial self-support? Or do you have feelings that you “should” be working again? A successful life after a TBI does not have to be defined by employment. Volunteer work can be very fulfilling.
- **Re-define your likes and interests.** They may be the same or different from before the injury. Finding enjoyable work can be a great motivator. You can use volunteer work as a way to learn what you would like to do.
- **Try volunteering.** Volunteering is an excellent way to start the process of returning to work. Volunteering usually offers flexibility in hours and time schedules. It is a good way to find out about energy levels, skill levels, and abilities. Also, volunteer work looks good on a resume and is a way to make contacts for potential work.

There are a variety of resources and methods for returning to work.

- **Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling.** Vocational rehabilitation counselors are professionals trained to advise people on finding work and identifying career resources. Some vocational rehabilitation counselors are trained to understand the needs particular to TBI survivors.

- **The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR).** DVR is a state and federal organization that can help you return to work. A DVR vocational counselor helps individuals one-on-one to design a customized, step-by-step plan to achieve desired job goals.
- **Learn on the job.** It is often better for people with a TBI to train on the job. For people with a moderate to severe TBI, it may be difficult to learn in formal educational settings and then try out their skills at a job. Vocation rehabilitation usually gets people with a disability back to work with training to learn job skills.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) can also hire someone to:

- Work with a potential employer to modify or design a job to match a person's needs.
 - Find an on-the-job or internship training opportunity.
 - Develop a Community Based Assessment allowing the individual to try out a few different job sites over a short period of time.
- **Educating the employer.** If you return to work, you will have the option of letting your employer know about the TBI. Once the employer is educated about the disability, the employer can begin to make accommodations. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has guidelines for work accommodations that a person with a TBI may need.
 - **Returning to work may require extra help.** There are paid professionals called job coaches, who can help by attending work with you to teach the skills needed and offering reminders during the day. This daily help can also be accomplished with co-workers who act as peer coaches. This form of help at work is called supported employment. It's best if it can last until you are comfortable on your own at the job. However, job coaches can be expensive and are only provided by DVR short term (usually three months).

- **Returning to work without losing benefits.** You may be on Social Security benefits and are worried about losing your benefits if you return to work. The Social Security Administration has a program called “Ticket to Work,” which is designed to help people return to work without losing disability benefits in the process. There are also different plans, such as the Plan to Achieve Self-Support or Impairment Related Work Expenses, which deduct expenses related to going to work from your income. A DVR counselor can provide benefits counseling with a Certified Benefits Planner to help you better understand how working may affect your benefits.

Return to Work

Tips for Caregivers

A person with a TBI must not only cope with the losses of who they were before their injury, but they may need to adjust to limitations that are poorly understood by those around them. This can be especially true in the workplace where competition and timelines often rule the workplace culture.

For an individual with a TBI, self-awareness of their own limitations after the injury may be difficult, but is important for successful return to the workplace. Helping identify strengths and weaknesses is an important first step in the process. The capacity to develop and maintain strategies for compensating for weaknesses and for appropriately utilizing strengths is essential to successful return to work.

- **Working with Vocational Rehabilitation counselors.** It is important to find a counselor who understands brain injury and the needs of a TBI survivor. The Brain Injury Association of Washington can help find a certified vocational rehabilitation counselor in your area.
- **Accessing the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR).** In order to receive DVR services an individual must meet all three of these criteria:
 1. A documented physical or mental impairment (such as TBI).
 2. The condition causes barriers to getting or keeping a job.
 3. The barriers to employment can be overcome with DVR assistance.
- **Gather necessary information.** It is important to have documented medical evidence describing the nature and severity of the TBI, particularly with regard to potential barriers to employment. Evaluations from a rehabilitation physician or a neuropsychologist are helpful in showing the severity of the TBI. If the client does not have sufficient medical evidence, the DVR counselor may schedule a physical exam and/or a psychological or neuropsychological evaluation.

- **Partnership for employment.** It is important to remember that DVR services are a partnership between the vocational rehabilitation counselor and the client. The client has a right to make decisions about the individualized program and services that will help them return to work. However, the client must also show cooperation with the DVR counselor and motivation in the job search process or the DVR counselor can close the client's case.

TBI may make people appear unmotivated, especially when they have difficulty with initiation. For these reasons, it is important to have a responsible individual accompany the TBI individual to all appointments, if possible. Having this individual help contact DVR from the start may also be valuable.

- **Supported employment.** Some of the best results in return to work have been with the use of supported employment. Supported employment services can range from an occasional reminder from a coworker to having a job coach present to help a TBI survivor learn job skills and routines. A job coach follows along at the job, 'shadowing' the TBI survivor, helping them to learn good work habits and job skills. The job coach can gradually fade out their help on the job site, but leave the individual with a task check list or other reminders.

Job coaches can be expensive and are only provided by DVR short term (usually three months). However, the general technique of learning on the job has proven to be more effective than traditional training for a job. For people with a TBI, generalizing new knowledge – that is, learning in a classroom and then applying that information on a job site – may be difficult. As a result, it can be better to do the bulk of the training on the job.

Return to Work

Discussion Questions

Purpose of discussion questions: These questions are designed to start discussion among group members about some common areas of difficulty with returning to work and about different strategies group members use to help them function more effectively.

Tips for leading a discussion:

To plan for the discussion, choose the questions that you think would be most appropriate for your group. Be flexible during the discussion and let group members talk about what is most important to them.

Take rough notes during the discussion to keep track of key points. You might want to have someone else take notes for you.

If the discussion gets off-topic, you can re-ask the question to remind the group of the topic.

To end the discussion, ask for any final comments and briefly summarize what was discussed.

Question:

What do you think you need to be able to do when you return to work?

Some possible answers:

- *Stay focused*
- *Get and stay organized*
- *Have good boundaries with co-workers*
- *Know how to ask for help*
- *Stay motivated*
- *Remember how to do all aspects of the job*
- *Complete the job you are asked to do*

Questions:

Is anyone willing to share their biggest strengths in returning to work?

Is anyone willing to talk about their biggest barrier?

How can you overcome these?

Questions:

What would you do if you get tired on the job?

How do you stay organized now?

How could you use this on a job?

Questions:

Can anyone share their experiences of working before the TBI?

Do you see yourself doing the same job or type of job or something else?

What really interests you?

Question:

Who do you know that can help with finding a new job?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Family*
- *Friends*
- *College counselors*

Question:

How do most people find jobs?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Through friends and meeting other people*
- *By getting experience through volunteering*
- *Job counseling*

Question:

What are some strategies for dealing with change?

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Be flexible – try to be open to other ways of doing things.*
- *Talk to a trusted friend and get feedback – perhaps the change isn't as bad as you think.*
- *Don't react! Take some time to consider what the change is all about.*

Return to Work

Group Activity

“Late For Work”

Purpose of activity: This group activity is designed to help group members recognize issues important in returning to work.

Tips for leading this activity:

There is no one correct answer for this activity. These are suggestions and the group may have different ideas that are just as good.

If anyone has a similar experience with trying to be on time for any appointment or even a job, let them share their experience.

Directions:

Read the story about John and his trouble getting to work on time to the group.

Then, ask the group if they have any solutions for John getting to work on time.

John's Story:

John is a survivor with a TBI. John got a job at XYZ company one month ago. John likes his new job and is good at his work. John does not drive a car and needs to take a bus to work.

However, John is having a problem getting to work on time. Today, John arrived 20 minutes late for work. This is the third time in the last two weeks that he's been late. John's boss, Mrs. Martin, has warned him several times about being on time.

John likes this new job and wants to keep it. John is getting frustrated with himself about showing up late. Each morning, it seems like everything is going fine, but before John knows it...he has just missed his 7:45 bus.

Question for the Group: Can the group think of some ways that John can keep better track of the time and stay on schedule in the mornings to keep this new job?

Possible answers (if the group can't think of anything):

- *Alarm clock in kitchen set to go off at 7:35 am, reminds John he has 10 minutes to catch the bus.*
- *Phone call from friend or family at 7:30 am to check in with John, remind him to stay on schedule.*
- *Have John use a check list to follow to get ready, including when to leave the house at the right time.*
- *Have John change his morning routine to get the earlier bus. That way if John misses it, he can still catch the next bus and be on time.*
- *Have John check at work to see if he can carpool with anyone. He still needs to be ready on time when the carpool arrives. In return, John may be able to help pay for gas each week.*
- *Have John shower before going to bed. This gives him more time in the morning.*

Return to Work

Group Activity

“Changes at the Job”

Purpose of activity: This group activity is designed to help group members recognize issues important in returning to work.

Tips for leading this activity:

There is no one correct solution for this activity. These are suggestions and the group may have different ideas that are just as good.

Directions:

Read this story about Maria and the changes that happen at her job.

Then, ask the group if they have any solutions for how Maria can handle the changes. There are possible solutions at the end.

After the group has had a chance to discuss the solutions to Maria’s story and if they would like to do more, try reading the next section called “Discussion for the group about change” and ask the questions that follow.

Maria's story:

Maria is a TBI survivor with a part-time job at the neighborhood Community Center. Maria has a set schedule of job duties to perform.

1. Maria arrives at work everyday at 11am.
2. Maria first helps prepare lunches for the senior citizens.
3. Maria then helps serve the lunches and does clean-up at the end of lunch.
4. Maria does filing in the office and helps prepare the newsletter.
5. Maria helps write out the activity boards and at the end of the day she helps with recycling.
6. Maria leaves at 4:00 pm.

Maria likes this schedule and is comfortable with this routine.

Today, Maria's supervisor has called her into the office and said there will be some changes to the job. The supervisor needs Maria to come in at different times each week. Some days Maria will start at 10:30am and some days Maria will start at noon.

Maria's job duties will be different each day. Maria might help with the lunches, or she might be asked to help senior citizens off the buses. Maria may be asked to answer the phone and take messages some days.

Maria likes working at the community center, so she tried the new changes for a week. Maria does not like the new changes and she is getting confused and frustrated with all the new job duties.

Question: What can Maria do to help with these changes at this job?

Possible solutions if no one can think of answers:

- *Maria can go to her supervisor and talk about how hard it is as a person with TBI to make changes in her schedule.*
- *Maria can ask her supervisor if it's OK to add just one change at a time. This will be easier to handle.*
- *Maria can ask for help at work to design a new weekly check-list to help with the changes.*
- *Maria can ask for a meeting with her supervisor to look at her job description. Perhaps Maria's supervisor doesn't realize that what he is asking is not in Maria's job description.*
- *There may be someone in charge of Maria's supervisor that Maria can talk to about the changes.*
- *If Maria is having difficulty explaining her problem calmly, she may have a family member or friend write a letter explaining Maria's difficulty with change as a person with a TBI.*

Discussion for the group about change

A common reason people with a TBI lose a job is that a change occurs at the job. The change may cause the person with a TBI to become upset emotionally and create difficulty with their work performance. This can be true of other situations in life as well.

Questions to ask the group:

Can anyone share an experience of change that has been difficult for them?

What did you do to cope?

Can anyone in the group think of strategies that may have helped?

Return to Work

Resources

Returning to work after a brain injury can be a difficult process. The more help an individual with a significant TBI has, the better the chances of finding work that is a good fit.

Volunteer opportunities

Volunteering is an excellent way to begin a return to work and to find positive experiences in the community.

Many volunteer opportunities can be found in local flyers or newspapers. Opportunities in your local community may include organizations in which you participated in the past such as civic clubs, churches, schools, etc.

Here are several national resources to possibly start with:

- **Goodwill Industries**

Website: www.goodwill.org

Goodwill Industries provides opportunities in volunteering and work for individuals with a variety of disabilities.

- **Easter Seals**

Website: www.easterseals.com

Easter Seals provides volunteering, education, and outreach, so that people living with disabilities can function in their communities.

- **United Way of America**

Website: www.liveunited.org

The United Way of America focus includes promoting independence and improving health. Volunteer opportunities exist throughout the country.

- **Catholic Community Charities**

Website: www.catholiccharitiesusa.org

Catholic Community Charities provides service to people in need. Volunteer opportunities can be found on the website under 'Quick Find', 'Get Involved', 'Take Action: Volunteer.'

- **Jewish Family Services**

Website: <http://www.jfsseattle.org/index.html>

Jewish Family Service supports and assists individuals and families in their communities.

- **Volunteer Match**

Website: www.volunteermatch.org

A non-profit organization that helps people find volunteer opportunities in areas around the United States.

- **Vocational Counseling**

A vocational rehabilitation counselor is someone who provides individuals with a disability with career and educational counseling. They explore and evaluate the client's education, training, work history, work values, interests, skills, and personality traits.

Vocational rehabilitation counselors may arrange for aptitude and achievement tests to help the client make career decisions. They also work with individuals to develop their job-search skills and assist clients in locating and applying for jobs.

- **The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)**

Website: <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/DVR/>

Phone: 1-800-637-5627

Each state has a Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). The mission of the DVR is “to empower people with disabilities to achieve a greater quality of life by obtaining and maintaining employment.”

While this program serves individuals with TBI, it only serves those individuals interested in entering or re-entering the workforce. The program serves individuals who are exiting high school within a year to adults of any age.

The DVR assigns a counselor to each client. The counselor reviews the client’s abilities and helps find work that is appropriate to the client’s needs.

The DVR will also help with resources and identifying support for maintaining a job. It is important to note that DVR is only able to pay for on-the-job support for a limited time (generally up to three months).

There are no income guidelines for DVR services. You are, however, required to complete a financial statement to disclose income and resources. If you have sufficient income and/or resources, you may be responsible to help pay for some services. Clients on SSI, SSDI, or DSHS public assistance are not expected to pay for services. However, verification of assistance is required.

- **Washington State Client Assistance Program (CAP)**

Website: <http://washingtoncap.org/>

Phone: 1-800-544-2121 (voice) 1-888-721-6072 (tty)

CAP is an advocacy program that can explain your rights and responsibilities as an applicant or client of rehabilitation agencies such as the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Services for the Blind, Projects with Industries, and Independent Living Programs.

- **What happens if I am receiving Social Security benefits?**

Some individuals with TBI may want to return to work, but may be worried about losing Social Security benefits and not being able to take care of themselves if a job doesn't work out.

Understanding Social Security work incentives and dealing with the agency can be difficult, even for those without a brain injury. However, there are resources to help find out about this process.

- **Plan to Work**

<http://www.plantowork.org/>

(866) 497-9433 (voice) / (877) 846-0775 (TTY)

Plan to Work is a statewide Work Incentive Planning and Assistance program. It consists of a statewide call center and a network of specially trained Community Work Incentive Coordinators who provide no-cost, one-on-one Benefits Analysis and Work Incentive Planning.

Plan to Work does not help you find employment.

Plan to Work will help explain what can happen to Social Security benefits if you are returning to work.

- **Positive Solutions**

http://psbrc.org/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1

Seattle (206) 322-8181 / Bremerton (360) 373-5206

Positive Solutions is a non-profit that helps individuals in King and Kitsap counties with disabilities answer questions about Social Security benefits.

- **Ticket to Work**

Website: http://www.yourtickettowork.com/program_info

Ticket to Work is a Social Security Administration employment program for people with disabilities who are interested in going back to work.

Ticket to Work is designed to remove barriers that influence people's decisions about going to work because of the concerns over losing health care coverage.

Under the Ticket Program, the Social Security Administration provides disability beneficiaries with a Ticket they may use to obtain the services and jobs they need from a group of organizations called Employment Networks (ENs). An example of an EN is the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

List of items to bring to an initial meeting with your Vocational Rehabilitation counselor (from Ticket to Work website)

Bring these items to make your visit as productive as possible.

- ❑ List of your medical, educational and vocational history and interests (If this is your first visit, bring in any records or documents that might be useful.)
- ❑ Existing medical or psychological records
- ❑ Any relevant existing information about your disability
- ❑ School records, relevant medical records, or on-the-job records
- ❑ List of your income, assets, and expenses
- ❑ Social Security Administration (SSA) Award Letter and any correspondence from SSA
- ❑ Work History (wages, dates and time period)
- ❑ Health care provider information
- ❑ List of all items needed for work
- ❑ Work goals/resume (if available)
- ❑ Means to achieve work goals
- ❑ Information about your spouse's or your parent's income and resources
- ❑ Information about assistance you receive with living expenses
- ❑ Amount of any financial resources (savings, CDs etc.)
- ❑ All unearned income information
- ❑ Monthly expenses
- ❑ Bring any advocates or family members who can help you (if you wish)

This is a general checklist. You may need more or less information depending on your individual goals and requested services.

Group Building Activities

Introductions

Purpose of activities: Here are some great ways for the group members to introduce themselves to everyone with a little more information than just their name.

Tips for leading these activities:

Choose one activity to try at the start of the meeting. Keep track of which one you used and try a different one at the next meeting.

Ask group members for feedback at the end of the introductions to see how people liked sharing.

Everyone should have a chance to share, but you may want to use a timer to limit how long each person has. Decide as a group on the sharing time (3 minutes, for example) and stick to it.

“I Always Wanted to Be”

Have each member say their name and then what they wanted to be when they were growing up.

“What’s in a Name?”

Have each member say their name and then the origin of their name. This could be who named them, the person in their family they were named after, or the meaning of their name.

“The Things We Carry”

Have each member say their name, share something they brought with them, and describe why it is important to them. It’s amazing how many important things people carry with them every day.

“Gratefulness”

Have each member say their name and then one thing they are grateful for.

Group Building Activities

Getting-To-Know-You Activities

Purpose of activities: These activities are creative ways for group members to strengthen friendships.

“Two Truths and a Lie”

Directions:

Everyone in the group should think of what they have done in their lives and write down two true statements and one untrue statement (a lie).

Group members take turns sharing their statements without telling the group which ones are true. The other group members guess which one is the lie.

“Share and Question”

Directions:

Group members take turns making statements about themselves, such as “I had a cat when I was little,” or “My favorite thing to do is paint.”

After a group member has made a statement, anybody who wants to ask the person a question about the statement can raise a hand.

Questions can be specific, such as “What was your cat’s name?” or general, such as “Can you tell me more about that?”

Set a limit on two or three questions for each statement, and use a timer to limit how long each person can share their answers. One minute per answer should be enough.

“Group Interview”

Directions:

Group members take turns being the subject of an interview where the other group members ask them questions about themselves.

Group members should be instructed to carefully consider questions before asking them, to make sure they are not too personal.

The person being interviewed can skip a question they do not want to answer by saying “pass.”

Set a time limit for the interview. Three to five minutes should be enough.

“Mood Boosters”

Directions:

Group members divide into groups of two or three. Each person asks his or her partner(s) the following questions. Partners should respond with a few examples for each.

Questions:

What are you proud of?

What are you good at?

What do you do that makes you feel happy?

Group Building Activities

Commonalities

Purpose of activities: These activities can help build relationships among group members by showing them what they have in common.

Tip for leading these activities:

In each activity, start by making a statement that is true for you, and group members can respond accordingly.

“Commonality Circle”

Directions:

Group members sit in a circle. The facilitator starts by making a personal statement, such as “My favorite food is spaghetti,” or “My favorite season is spring.” There are more examples at the end of this section. Group members join in, making statements one at a time.

When group members hear a statement that is true for them, they move their chairs closer into the middle of the circle.

When they hear a statement that does not apply to them, they move their chairs a little farther out of the circle.

Group members should be instructed that their action of moving in or out of the circle is their response. They shouldn’t speak unless it’s their turn to make a statement.

Each group member should get to make at least one statement. If the group seems to be enjoying the activity, have everyone make one or two more statements.

Finish the activity with a statement that ties back into the focus of the support group such as, “We are all here to help each other in TBI recovery.”

Sample Statements

- My favorite food is _____.
- My favorite season is _____.
- I had a pet when I was little.
- I have brothers and sisters.
- I was born in _____.
- I hate to eat _____.
- When I was little, I wanted to be _____ when I grew up.
- My favorite thing to do is _____.
- My birthday is in _____.
- My favorite holiday is _____.
- My favorite month is _____.

“Commonality Poker: I Never”

Directions:

This activity can be done with group members sitting around a large table. Each group member begins with 5 to 10 poker chips (or another marker such as small squares of paper).

In this game, group members share things they’ve **never done**, such as “I’ve never been in a hot air balloon.”

If other members have actually done this activity, they push a poker chip to the middle of the table.

Decide before beginning how many turns each person will have to share what they’ve never done. Then go around the circle that many times.

Recovery Discussions

Purpose of activities: These discussion topics are meant to get people to share their thoughts about recovery from TBI with the rest of the group. Choose one to try at a meeting, make note of which one you used, and try a different one at the next meeting.

Tips for leading these activities:

Members should only share as much as they are comfortable with and should be allowed to “pass.”

Everyone should have a chance to share, but you may want to use a timer to limit how long each person has. Decide as a group on the sharing time (5 minutes, for example) and stick to it. After everyone has shared once, the discussion can be opened to additional comments.

“I’m a Work in Progress”

Read this statement aloud to introduce the topic:

Recovery from a TBI can take a long time. Some people have a hard time understanding your recovery process and it can be very difficult explaining your situation to others. Here is a phrase that some people use to sum up TBI recovery: “I’m a work in progress.”

Questions to ask the group:

Does this phrase have meaning for you?

How does the phrase describe areas in your life that you are working on, but still need time to improve?

Let’s go around the group and have everyone finish the phrase, “I’m a work in progress because _____.”

Some possible examples of “work in progress” areas if no one has a response:

- *Communication*
- *Relationships*
- *Remembering daily tasks*

“Hope”

Read this statement aloud to introduce the topic:

Hope is defined as “to believe, to desire, or trust.” Hope is also defined as “to look forward to with desire and reasonable confidence.” Hope is an important motivator for everyone. Hope helps us get through difficult times.

Questions to ask the group:

What does hope mean to each of us in this room? Think about this question and let’s go around the group and have everyone share one thing that gives them hope.

Some possible answers if no one has a response:

- *Other individuals with a TBI who are an inspiration in life*
- *New research in science and medicine*
- *A friend or family member who’s always there for you*
- *The next beautiful sunset you get to see*

“What Do You Tell Others?”

Read this statement aloud to introduce the topic:

You can often choose who you tell about your TBI. Depending on who these people are, you may tell them different things. For example, you may tell your boss different things than you would tell a close friend.

Questions to ask group:

Who do you think it is important to tell?

How do you tell people about your TBI?

When do you tell them?

If you were going to tell someone about your TBI today, what do you think you would want to say?

Conversation Starters

Directions: These conversation topics can be used in several ways. The group can use them to get to know each other better, to practice conversation skills, or as part of the Communication Topic or the Relationships Topic.

Tips for leading this activity:

Try to give everyone a chance to participate. Ask members with a lot to say to be respectful of others who need time to talk.

If a group member gives a short answer, ask follow-up questions like: “Tell me more about that” or “What do you think about that now?”

1. What are your all-time favorite movies?
2. What is the most disgusting food you’ve ever eaten?
3. What is your favorite place that you have lived in and why?
4. What is the most enjoyable vacation that you have taken?
5. What would be your dream vacation?
6. How have things changed since you were younger?
7. What sort of music do you like to listen to?
8. What did you want to grow up to be when you were a child?
9. If you could trade places with anyone in the world, who would it be?
10. Who is a personal hero of yours?
11. What are your hobbies?
12. What do you think about sports?

Resources

Websites:

Brain Injury Association of Washington

www.biawa.org

253-238-6085

Helpline: 1-800-523-5438

Email: info@biawa.org

Brain Injury Association of America

www.biausa.org

703-761-0750

Brain injury information hotline: 1-800-444-6443

Email: FamilyHelpline@biausa.org

Washington State Traumatic Brain Injury Council

Helpline: 1-877-824-1766

<http://www.tbiwashington.org>

University of Washington TBI Model Systems:

www.tbi.washington.edu

More Internet Resources:

TBI Survivors Network, a social and information network:

<http://tbisurvivorsnetwork.ning.com/>

Logan Magazine, a publication for young people with disabilities:

<http://www.loganmagazine.com/>

On-line support group: <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/SoTBI>

On-line peer support website: <http://tbihome.org/index.html>

Ohio Valley Center for Brain Injury Prevention and Rehabilitation:
<http://www.ohiovalley.org>

BrainLine, a website for the prevention, treatment, and life with a traumatic brain injury:
www.Brainline.org

Mental health resource for servicemen and women:
<http://www.afterdeployment.org>

Moving On, A Personal Futures Planning Workbook for Individuals with Brain Injury by B. Mount, D. Riggs, M. Brown, and M. Hibbard

Downloadable as a PDF from Mount Sinai Traumatic Brain Injury Central website: <http://mssm.edu/tbicentral/resources/publications/>

Book:

Brain on a String by PJ Long. A resource to organize projects for people with a traumatic brain injury.
Available from www.equipress.com

Resources for Caregivers:

Caregiver website: <http://www.caregiver911.com/>

TBI resource guide: <http://www.neuroskills.com/>

Family caregiver alliance:
<http://www.caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/home.jsp>

Waiting during early stages after injury:
<http://www.waiting.com/comawaiting.html>

Mindtools: website with articles about personal time management skills
http://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_HTE.htm

FAQ about head injury from the Texas Head Injury Association
<http://hosting.texoma.net/business/biotech/thia-faq.htm>

Lee Woodruff talks about her husband, Bob Woodruff who sustained a TBI in Iraq:

<http://www.brainline.org/content/content.php?id=186>

Respite Care

Information about respite care:

http://www.helpguide.org/elder/respite_care.htm

Links to community resources for respite care in Washington State:

<http://www.adsa.dshs.wa.gov/caregiving/respite.htm>

Domestic Violence Resources

National Domestic Violence Hotline

<http://www.ndvh.org>

1-800-799-SAFE(7233)

1-800-787-3224 (TTY)

National Mental Health Resources

National Mental Health Association

<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net>

1-800-969-6642

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

1-800-273-TALK