



## FAMILY ADJUSTMENT

Ways to cope and help when a family member sustains a brain injury.

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When a loved one sustains a brain injury, the impact on the family can be devastating.

They are confronted by many emotions, stresses, decisions and adjustments which may seem unmanageable. • The family may feel overwhelmed by the effects of the brain injury, its complications and the uncertainty of the outcome. • Anxiety and frustration may be experienced by the family when faced with the need to make decisions for which they are unprepared. • There will be disruption in the family's routine and a resetting of priorities as time and attention is needed by the family member with a brain injury.

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EMOTIONS EXPERIENCED BY THE FAMILY?

Initially, there will be shock and feelings of disbelief and unreality. There may be feelings of guilt when a family thinks they could have done something to prevent the accident. There is denial. As families cling to hope, they often do not accept the implications of what has happened or what the medical staff are telling them.

There is anger which may be directed at the health care team because it cannot give definite answers or assurances regarding outcome. It may be directed at the person who caused the accident, the individual, or a Higher Power for allowing the accident to happen.

### HOW CAN FAMILIES COPE WHEN ONE OF ITS MEMBERS SUSTAINS A BRAIN INJURY?

Families have a support system in their love and compassion for one another but, when a family member incurs a brain injury, they may need outside help. The family can seek help from their clergy, the hospital chaplain, the social worker or other members of the treatment team. The BIA of IL can direct the family to a Brain Injury Support Group and to individuals who have had similar

experiences as well as provide information about brain injury. Family members should be encouraged to discuss their fears and concerns with friends, relatives and staff. Families will cope better when each member practices good physical and mental health habits. These include regular meals, rest, recreation, exercise and the use of relaxation techniques. The family should let others know their needs and what they can do to help.

Professional help should be sought when stress builds. Signs of stress may include: loss of sleep and/or appetite, feelings of negative self worth, lack of care in appearance and personal hygiene, inability to concentrate and increased dependence on alcohol and/or medications.

### WHAT CAN THE FAMILY DO TO HELP THE PERSON WITH A BRAIN INJURY?

It is essential that open communication be maintained with the health care team to enable family participation in care and decisions relating to treatment. Families should appoint one person to communicate with medical staff. The person with a brain injury should be encouraged to function at his/her level of ability. Frustration and disappointment will be diminished when expectations are realistic. Watch for signs of fatigue, allow rest periods between activities, and limit visitors according to tolerance. Families should talk openly and honestly with the person with a brain injury about goals, gains and achievements, regardless of how slight, and praise should be given freely. The use of familiar objects and possessions may help the person with a brain injury to improve orientation and memory. Talk to the individual about events, people and activities in which he/she was interested in prior to the injury. The individual with a brain injury should be encouraged to express his/her feelings and concerns. Allow

sufficient time for the individual with a brain injury to find the right word and to answer questions. Let the staff know what the person was like pre-injury and what their interests were. This will improve relationships between the patient and staff as well as help in planning activities. Be yourself in relating to the person with a brain injury and strive to maintain a calm atmosphere and predictable schedule. Interact with the person in the same manner you always have.

The mission of the Brain Injury Association of Illinois is to create a better future through brain injury prevention, research, education and advocacy.

This is accomplished through:

- Acting as an information and resource clearinghouse
- Sponsoring annual educational programming
- Facilitation of statewide support groups
- Sponsoring adult and pediatric recreational camps
- Actively participating in legislative advocacy
- Fostering prevention awareness
- Encouraging research

## How Will BIA of IL Help Me?

The Brain Injury Association of Illinois is a statewide non-profit, statewide membership organization comprised of people with brain injuries, family members, friends and professionals. Our programs and services include:

ADVOCACY  
Individual  
Public Policy

EDUCATION  
Annual Educational Conference  
Educational Materials  
Educational Training  
Injury Prevention Program  
Public Awareness

SOCIAL/RECREATION  
Camp FunZone (Pediatric Camp)  
Wilderness Endeavor (Adult Camp)

FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES  
Information & Resources  
Support Groups Statewide  
Peer Support Program  
Toll-free Family Resource Line



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