

## Information for Friends and Family About Brain Injury and Social Relationships

Lots of things change after a traumatic brain injury, so this is to help you understand some of my symptoms. Over time, all of these things will improve as I get better. Because you're someone close to me, the most important thing I ask for is for you to support me in being hopeful as I get better, and to understand that I'm going through a long process of recovery.

A traumatic brain injury can sometimes lead to fatigue, trouble sleeping, and difficulty concentrating. Because of these changes, here are some things that might be different until I recover more:

1. Getting together earlier in the day instead of later: I might not be at my best in the evenings, by which time I'm tired out. Usually people get together socially in the evening, but it would help me if we get together earlier in the day, or at least in the early evening.
2. Getting together with just 1 or 2 people at a time: It's hard to concentrate when a lot of things are happening at once. Parties and social gatherings with a lot of people are a little overwhelming for me right now. It will work better for me if I see my friends in smaller groups, just 1 or 2 people at a time. If I do come to a party or holiday gathering, I might not stay long. I love you all, but I'm leaving early because I get worn out more easily.
3. Returning phone calls, text messages, and emails: Checking phone messages and reading email requires a lot of concentration, and that can wear me out. Please understand that it may take me longer to return your messages, and be patient with me.
4. Good days and bad days: Some days I have more energy than others, and some days I just have trouble doing anything at all because I haven't slept well. If we have a plan to get together on a particular day, and I have to cancel it or end our get-together early because I am tired and worn out, please do not take it personally, and know that we can reschedule it for another day.

A traumatic brain injury can also affect parts of the brain that are involved in social behavior and emotions. Because of these changes, here are some things I would ask you to be patient with until I recover more:

1. Changeable emotions and moods: The parts of the brain that control emotions are affected in a brain injury. Sometimes, I may be more moody or emotional, and my feelings may change rapidly during an interaction with you. Please do not take these changes personally, it's just where I am right now. Please be patient as I recover emotionally.
2. Flattened or dulled emotions: Sometimes, I may seem less emotional than I did before, and less responsive. Please understand that this does not mean I don't care about you, it's just where I am right now. I care inside, but it may not show as much on the outside. Please be patient as I recover emotionally.

This document is something you can use to educate your friends and extended family about what might be different for you since your brain injury. This document is meant to be added to, adapted, and changed as it's appropriate for you. That's why I'm providing it as a Microsoft Word file that you can change, or that someone close to you can help you change. Please make use of it, share it, change it as it's appropriate for you, and give it to people who might need the information. I hope it's helpful!

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Social and emotional changes after a traumatic brain injury, continued:

3. A different sense of humor: Did you know that the parts of the brain that allow us to understand and appreciate humor may be affected by a brain injury? It's true, so if my sense of humor seems different than it used to, this is why. Please be patient with me, and understand that I may laugh at different things, or not laugh at things that I used to.
4. Conversations may go differently than they used to: Conversation requires a lot of concentration and attention, and that may be difficult for me right now, so I may not always seem like I'm paying as much attention to you as you want me to. Sometimes, this may come across as my just talking without letting you say something, or it just may not seem like I'm making eye contact as much. Please be patient with me, and help me work on this, in a gentle way. Together, maybe we can work out a way for you to signal me that I'm not letting you talk enough in the conversation, maybe by you raising your hand, or interrupting me by saying "hang on a minute, I want to say something here." As someone close to me, you can help me work on this and get better in this area. Please be patient and encourage me to work on this in my rehabilitation.
5. Blurting things out in conversation that I should have kept to myself: Also, the part of the brain that allows people to stop themselves from blurting something out can be affected by a brain injury. It's literally harder right now for me to stop this, but as I work on my recovery, this will get better. If I say something to you that seems hurtful or inappropriate, please be patient and do not take it personally. Remember that anyone can let something slip that they shouldn't, and we've all done it one time or another; I just may do it more often for a while. Please let me know in a gentle way that I've said something you didn't want to hear, and talk with me about how we can work on that in our relationship. For example, if I've blurted out, "That haircut looks terrible," you might try saying something to me like, "Hey, I know this is hard for you right now, but I just wanted to let you know that I didn't like hearing that my haircut doesn't look good to you. I know you didn't mean to hurt me, but I just wanted to let you know about that."
6. More trouble controlling anger: Sometimes, the parts of the brain that control anger and reactions to frustration are affected by brain injury. This isn't an issue for everyone with a brain injury, but it can be an issue for some people. This is also a problem that will get better over time. When a minor frustration happens, I may lose my temper over it when I never would have before. You should not let me be abusive, but I ask you to understand that my fuse is a little shorter than it used to be. I ask for your support and patience as I work on this in my recovery. When I've calmed down again after losing my temper, you can talk to me about it, and point out gently that I lost my temper over something very small. Please be patient and encouraging for me to work on this in my rehabilitation and recovery.

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