

## **SURVIVING BRAIN INJURY– HOW CAN FAMILIES COPE?**

*The following are excerpts from Alberta Brain Injury Initiative Survival Guide. These suggestions have been added to and/or revised by ARBI.*

Below are some coping strategies that may help if the changes in your family have become too overwhelming for you or any of your family members.

### **The Challenge**

Too many new responsibilities or difficulty keeping up with tasks that used to be simple before the injury.

### **Suggestions for coping**

The biggest key to coping is to reduce demands on your time. You might try some of the following suggestions:

- Simplify your life. Things are not going to pick up where they left off. Do not do
- anything you don't have to do for awhile.
- Find out if you can pay for help. Home Care, private companies, live-in nannies or
- housekeepers are some possibilities. Check if the cost of this service will be
- paid by your insurance.
- Pass on some duties to a family member, advocate, or close friend. Try to spread out

the duties between several people to keep everyone from feeling overburdened.

People that know you, do want to help.

### **The Challenge**

New roles can be overwhelming. A lot of stress comes from being responsible. The idea here is to let go of your new role/responsibilities for a while to help take some of the weight off your shoulders.

### **Suggestions for coping**

Try some of the following:

- Pass some duties back to the survivor, if that's possible. Family members find themselves doing a lot for the survivor because they fear for their loved one's safety or dignity. Letting the survivor try things on their own is the way to pass these duties back to them. Don't be afraid to let your loved one experience some failures – there will be lots of successes as well.
- Make time for fun or relaxation for yourself. It does not have to be a lot. It could be 15 minutes of listening to music, coffee with a friend, or an evening playing ball. It is a good thing for you to drop the load you are carrying for a little while and have fun. Don't feel guilty, you deserve it and will be more effective in coping afterwards.
- Take one day at a time. When you feel overwhelmed, take one hour at a time. You can only do what you can do. You are stronger than you might give yourself credit for.

### **The Challenge**

New roles are upsetting for the survivor and/or other family members.

### **Suggestions for coping**

Acknowledge the survivor's feelings even if you cannot deal with them immediately. When the family is ready to deal with the difficulty of the new roles you might try some of the following suggestions:

- The survivor and family should develop a plan together when making decisions about the recovery goals. Both family and the survivor should list their worries and problems.
- You may want to limit the list to each family member's top three worries so that no one feels overwhelmed or attacked. The key is to avoid letting your worries build up to the point where you are apt to explode at the other person. You may want to consider having a professional involved when you do the planning. This will help avoid a situation where one family member feels teamed up on.
- Write down all family members' new roles. Make sure that everyone in the family has a role that will make them feel like an important member of the family. These roles should be defined and clearly understood by all family members. Keep in mind that these roles can and should change as the recovery process goes on. Again, a professional might be of help here.

### **The Challenge**

The survivor is like a new person.

### **Suggestions for coping**

This can be a difficult experience. It is often best dealt with by talking to others who understand. You might try some of the following:

- Attend a brain injury caregiver support group. Sharing your experience with others who know firsthand what you are going through can be helpful. Keep in mind that everyone deals with things differently. You will find a person and/or family that you can best relate to and they will provide you with the best suggestions and support.
- Talk to a counselor who has experience with brain injury. Talking to someone knowledgeable about such changes can help you understand your feelings and help you make the best life decisions for you.

### **The Challenge**

You and/or another family member feels depressed.

### **Suggestions for coping**

- If you or a family member show serious signs of depression, you should see a professional. You can start with your family doctor. Your Service Coordinator might be able to direct you to a private counselor or a support group. Don't be ashamed to ask for help, depression is common after such an enormous life change. It won't last forever.

## **The Challenge**

Denial is leading to difficulties in your home.

## **Suggestions for coping**

If it is your family who is in denial, they may be pushing you beyond your limits.

- Talk about changes that you have noticed. This can be very effective, though sometimes the help of a professional is needed. If it is the survivor who is in denial, it may lead to them trying something unsafe.
- Help the survivor to see what they can and cannot do. (Use experiments to help them understand this concept.)
- If it is one of your family members who is in denial and cannot accept that their loved one may be different for the rest of their lives, give it time. This is a natural process and everyone deals with it and comes to terms with it at different stages in the recovery.

This is just a summary of some suggestions that may help you cope with the new life changes and challenges in your life. For more detailed information, please contact the Alberta Brain Injury Network at (780) 415-2747 to find out the closest place to you where you can receive a copy of the Alberta Brain Injury Network *Survival Guide*.