



TBI TODAY

News, Ideas, and Resources from the Virginia TBI Model System

HOW TO TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT BRAIN INJURY

After a relative or friend has a brain injury, life can be especially hard for children. They have a hard time understanding what has happened, how to cope, and how to help. Parents often say that they have trouble explaining injuries to their children. Here are some ideas of ways you can explain brain injury to your child after one of their family members or friends is injured -

- * The brain is like a command station of a space ship. To understand brain injury, think about what would happen if the command station were hit by a meteorite. If a meteorite hits the command station, the command station may not be able to control the direction the ship travels or what the ship does. The brain controls how the whole body works like the command station controls the ship. After the brain is hurt, it may send out the wrong signals to the body or send out no signals at all. A person with a brain injury may have trouble walking, talking, hearing, or seeing. They may even need a machine to help them breathe.
- * Most of the time, a broken bone will heal and be good as new. A hurt brain is different. The person with the injury may look the same, but usually they will act different than before. The person may walk slowly or use a wheelchair to get around. They may get tired easily and sleep a lot. Paying attention may be harder for them. They may not remember what you say to them. They may have trouble understanding a joke or telling a story. They might say or do things that are strange or embarrassing. They may get angry more easily and have temper problems.
- * The person might be upset because of the changes caused by their injury. There may be things that the person with a brain injury cannot do anymore, like playing soccer or going swimming. If other people laugh or treat the person differently than before, the person may feel sad and cry easily. Sometimes a person with a brain injury will be very angry about the injury and might get mad and yell a lot.
- * A bad cut may take a few days or weeks to get better. A broken leg may take six weeks or longer to heal. Getting better after a brain injury takes a long time, even longer than getting better from a broken leg. Getting better may take months or even years. Sometimes people with a brain injury have problems for the rest of their lives. Still, they can

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feel better and learn new ways to do things.

- * Brain injury changes people, sometimes a little, sometimes a lot. You might be confused by the changes you see. Still, you love and care about the person anyway. Even though they might seem sad or mad sometimes, remember that they still love and care about you too. Try to remember that the changes are caused by a brain injury. Then the changes will be easier to accept.
- * Explaining these points to your child may help him or her better understand what has happened to their family member or friend. Your child may feel better if he or she un-

derstands what is going on and be less scared. Talking about the injury also opens the lines of communication and lets them know it is okay to talk to you about it.

- * The National Resource Center recently published a book entitled, *A Kid's Guide to Brain Injury*. The book helps teach children about brain injury and its effects, and the content is geared for children ages 6 to 14. If you are interested in purchasing this book, contact the National Resource Center to request a catalog at (804) 828-9055 or visit the website at www.neuro.pmr.vcu.edu.

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