

# ADJUSTMENT, GRIEF AND LOSS AFTER BRAIN INJURY

Adjustment to loss will not only affect the individual with the acquired brain injury but also those who are close to them, such as partners, family, and friends. Those close to the person with an acquired brain injury may also experience loss in a number of ways. For example they may experience a loss of a friend, a loss of independence and freedom, or a loss of intimacy. Some may lose marriages, jobs, houses, income, and/or their social network.

Adjustment to loss generally involves a grieving process. Grieving is an individual and mostly private experience, and at times may seem very lonely. Individuals who have an acquired brain injury or those close to them may not be seen to have experienced loss at all. In fact they are often told that they are lucky to be alive. Sometimes these types of comments make the person experiencing loss feel more alone.

There are many emotions involved in the adjustment and grieving process. These can include shock, disbelief, denial, anger, resentment, guilt, despair, helplessness, hopelessness, depression, sadness and acceptance. However not everyone will experience all of these emotions nor do they occur in any predictable way. The way a person experiences these feelings and their sense of loss is associated with how the individual perceives themselves and the world around them.

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## ADJUSTMENT, GRIEF AND LOSS

### Strategies for managing personal loss and adjustment:

- Be willing to share your personal thoughts on these issues with someone close to you that you can trust and that you feel comfortable with.
- Write a story or journal about your own changes and how it fits in with your worldview. Explore your worldview and what is important to you. Explore your life expectations and goals.
- Explore other ways to achieve your goals using your current strengths and abilities.
- Identify your fears and if you feel comfortable start to explore them one by one.
- Find ways of making yourself feel better or cope within your situation, that is, identify some coping strategies. Remember, what makes someone else feel better won't necessarily make you feel better.
- Seek counseling from a psychologist or counselor with acquired brain injury expertise.
- Seek support from organizations that specialize in acquired brain injury.

### Strategies for families, friends and caregivers to help others through the process of loss and adjustment:

#### For more information contact:

**Sask North ABI  
Outreach Team**  
Prince Albert, SK

Phone: (306) 765-6631  
Fax: (306) 765-6657  
1 (866) 899-9951

**Sask Central ABI  
Outreach Team**  
Saskatoon, SK

Phone: (306) 655-7743  
Fax: (306) 655-8454  
1 (888) 668-8717

**Sask South ABI  
Outreach Team**  
Regina, SK

Phone: (306) 766-5617  
Fax: (306) 766-5144  
1 (866) 766-5617

- Listen to the person who has experienced the loss
- Reflect what the person is saying to you, without projecting your own feelings onto them
- Identify and legitimize all of the feelings. Try to identify all of the feelings the person is experiencing by putting a label to them, for example regret, sadness, hopelessness. If you can, help the person recognize why they have these feelings. For example simple things like, "No wonder you feel so frustrated when you are unable to drive yourself to your friend's place."
- Interpret 'normal' behavior, for example, "It seems to me natural to feel sad about losing your skills to drive".
- Allow for individual differences.
- Allow time for the person to grieve.
- Help the person to problem solve themselves. For example, "So you are feeling useless because you are unable to play soccer with your son, how can you feel useful in other ways" OR "How can you go about this in another way?" For example they can play other games.
- Avoid platitudes like, "You're lucky to be alive" and, "I know how you feel".
- Don't feel bad about expressing your own needs. The more clearly you can define them the better you can work out ways to fulfill them.
- Look after your own needs for fun, peace and quiet, for company and for a life of your own. It will make you a better caregiver, friend, family member or partner.
- Seek support from organizations that specialize in acquired brain injury.

**Crisis support can be obtained from dialing 811 or by dialing 911 if life is in danger**