



Parenting for Adults with Traumatic Brain Injury

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INTRODUCTION

Parenting can be challenging for anyone. Unfortunately, the problems that happen after traumatic brain injury (TBI) can make parenting even more of a challenge. In this brochure we describe how TBI can affect parenting. Next we discuss some of common challenges faced by parents with TBI. We also offer some suggestions or tips to help parents deal with these challenges. Lastly, we include information and resources about where to go for more help.

If you are experiencing any challenges with parenting, know that you are not alone. We hope that this information will help you become more confident and satisfied with the important job of raising your children.



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HOW DOES TBI AFFECT PARENTING?

There are several ways that TBI can have a negative impact on parenting. We use the term “*barriers*” to describe things that make parenting more difficult. There are two types of *barriers* that can affect parenting after TBI.

- *Direct Injury to the Brain:* Some barriers to parenting happen as a direct result of injury to your brain. Injury to the brain can cause changes in your physical functioning (or your ability to get around), your thinking, and your emotions. Problems in each of these areas can make parenting a challenge.
- *Other Life Changes after TBI:* Other barriers to parenting may be caused by further life changes that can happen after TBI. For example, financial problems, being unable to drive, and relationship changes that can happen after TBI can also make parenting a challenge.

Many problems with parenting are caused by a combination of both types of barriers.



WHAT ARE THE COMMON CHALLENGES FACED BY PARENTS OF TBI?

This section describes some of the common challenges parents with TBI may experience after injury. This information was put together from the real-life experiences of parents with TBI. Keep in mind that everyone is different. You may or may not have experienced each of these issues.

Decreased Participation in Parenting Due to Changes in Thinking Abilities

Some difficulties performing parenting activities are caused by changes in thinking abilities that are common after TBI. *Continued on next page...*

COMMON CHALLENGES FACED BY PARENTS OF TBI *continued...*

For example, people with TBI may have trouble with memory, attention, organization, planning ahead, and keeping track of more than one thing at a time. Difficulties with any of these can make parenting activities a challenge. For example, problems with thinking can make it difficult to help children with their homework. It may also be difficult to keep track of children's schedules and activities. Some people may find that it is hard to follow a recipe and cook meals for their children.

Decreased Participation in Parenting Due to Changes in Physical Functioning

Physical problems are common after TBI. For example, people with TBI may have problems with movement or getting around. Some people may also have dizziness, changes in vision, physical pain, and headaches. Increased fatigue or feeling tired a lot is also very common and you might require more sleep. All of these physical changes can make it harder to participate in certain parenting activities. For example, physical changes can make it difficult for parents to play sports and engage in other recreational activities with their children. Parents with infants or young children may require assistance in holding, feeding, bathing, and dressing

their children because of physical limitations. In addition, increased fatigue or feeling tired can make day-to-day parenting activities even more exhausting.

Decreased Participation in Parenting Due to Emotional/ Behavioral Changes

Emotional and behavior changes can happen after TBI and may contribute to problems with parenting. It is natural to feel sad or worried after a stressful life event like a TBI. However, some people may suffer from more severe emotional problems like depression and anxiety. Both depression and anxiety can make it hard to find joy or happiness in parenting. Some parents may not seem as interested in planning and participating in family activities as they did before their injury. Occasionally, people with TBI may experience difficulty controlling their emotions and this can impact parenting. For instance, some parents may cry easily or laugh at inappropriate times. Trouble controlling laughter, in particular, can be frustrating and may undermine a parent's authority when they are attempting to discipline children or enforce rules.



COMMON CHALLENGES FACED BY PARENTS OF TBI *continued...*

Financial Stress

Parents who are not able to work after TBI may have less money to provide for their household. Some people may have to reduce the amount they spend on family celebrations and holidays. It may also be difficult to cover the cost of children's extracurricular and leisure activities. Financial problems can also increase stress for everyone in the family.



Parenting Role Changes

Parents with TBI may have difficulty returning to their role as parent after TBI. There may be a change in how people view themselves as a parent. Some may not feel like a “parent” anymore. Some parents may feel less confident in their parenting skills. Other parents may worry that their kids won't look up to them or respect them anymore. Parents may also have difficulty enforcing household rules and assuming a position of authority. Occasionally, these parents may shy away from taking on a parenting role and may defer parenting activities to a spouse, partner, or other family member.



Problems with Parent-Child Relationship

After TBI, parents may experience changes or problems in their relationship with their children. Some parents may feel distant from their children. Some people may spend several months in the hospital after TBI. This time away may cause children to feel distant from their parent and it may take some time and effort on the part of the parent to reestablish a close connection with the child. Other relationship problems can be caused by increased irritability and anger that are common after TBI. Occasionally, parents may have less patience or may become easily irritated with their children after TBI – especially during stressful situations. Fortunately, learning how to manage stress and getting enough sleep can help prevent anger and irritability from affecting your relationship with your children. ⁴

SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS WITH TBI

Although parenting may be more difficult with TBI, the good news is that there are many things you can do to make parenting with TBI a little easier. Below are some suggestions that may be helpful for parents with TBI.

- *Go Easy on Yourself:* It is important to know that no parent is perfect. All parents face some problems at one time or another. Try not to be too hard on yourself about any problems with parenting you might be having because of your TBI. Being critical of yourself can create additional stress that can make your problems even worse. The best thing to do once you recognize a problem is to make a specific plan to help you work through the issue. Your plan may involve seeking out additional information on the topic, talking with another parent, or seeking help from your doctor or a rehabilitation specialist.
- *Take Care of Yourself:* You will be better prepared to take care of your children when you take care of yourself. Make sure to get enough sleep, choose to eat healthy foods, and engage in exercise or some form of physical activity. It is also helpful to spend some time away from parenting to do something that makes you happy. Even 15 minutes of doing an activity that you enjoy, such as reading a magazine or taking a walk, can help you feel refreshed and better able to handle the demands of parenting.
- *Minimizing Fatigue/Tiredness:* To work around physical and mental tiredness, try to plan activities with your children for the time of day when you have the most energy. You can also break up activities like homework or playtime into shorter sessions. Make sure to schedule breaks as necessary. For parents with school age children, plan ahead and don't wait until the last minute to help children with large projects.



SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS WITH TBI continued...

" *Coping with Changes in Participation:* Because of your TBI, you may not be able to participate in certain activities with your child. It is understandable that this may cause you to feel frustrated and disappointed. Some parents may worry that not being able to do certain family activities will affect their relationship with their children. There are several ways to cope with this issue:

- One way to cope with this issue is to focus on your strengths. Rather than dwelling on the things you can't do, make a list of activities that you can do with your children. You could also ask your children to help you come up with new ideas.
- Also remember that there are lots of ways to show love, affection, and attention to your child. Show physical affection toward your children with kisses, hugs, and snuggles. Make a point to say, "I love you" to your children. Give your children positive attention by asking about their interests, friends, and activities.

- Setting aside time to talk and listen to your children can strengthen your relationship. During this time, try to arrange a quiet environment to reduce distractions and help you focus on your child. Repeating back what your child says can help him or her feel understood and can also help you maintain your focus. Also remember to smile and make eye contact when you are talking with your child.



SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS WITH TBI continued...

- " *Accept Help:* Reach out to trusted family and friends to help with childcare, transportation, or other parenting activities.
- *Open Communication about TBI:* Communicate openly with your children about your injury. Use simple words to discuss any changes you may have experienced in your thinking, emotions, or physical abilities - especially changes that your child might notice. Start the conversation with your children rather than waiting for your children to bring it up first. Listen to your children and allow them to express their feelings. Some parents may worry that discussing their injury will make their children upset. However, not talking about your TBI with your children can make them feel more anxious. It is important to give children the opportunity to express any painful feelings or fears they might have. Being open and accepting when discussing your injury can help children feel comforted and is good for your relationship.

- " *Get Organized:* Following consistent routines and using a family calendar can decrease stress, help you stay organized and improve the wellbeing of both parents and children.

- Set-up and follow some simple daily routines for your family. It is helpful to have a consistent family routine for mornings, after school/work, dinnertime, and bedtime. If any of these times of day are stressful for you or your family, you may need to come up with new routine. For example, families that are always late getting out the door in the morning could develop a new routine of setting out clothes and making lunches the night before.
- Use a family calendar to keep track of everyone's schedules, appointments and important events. Make sure to place the calendar in a common area in your home where everyone can see it. Next to the calendar is a good place to keep grocery lists, a list of chores for each family member, and other to-do lists.



SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS WITH TBI continued...

- " *Adaptive Childcare Equipment:* There are some childcare products that may help parents with physical limitations. For example, “talking” thermometers that speak the readout may be helpful for parents with vision changes after TBI. Baby safety harnesses can increase independence for parents in wheelchairs. Cribs with gates in the railings can also be helpful for parents in wheelchairs and those who are not able to bend over a traditional crib railing.
 - DVDs on parenting techniques, adaptations, equipment, and strategies for parents with functional limitations or disabilities are available for purchase on the following website:
<https://lookingglass.org/store/>
 - A book titled “Adaptive Baby Care Equipment: Guidelines, Prototypes & Resources “ is available for purchase on the following website:
http://www.lookingglass.org/store/product_info.php?products_id=3
 - A listing of Adaptable Parenting Products is available at the following website:
http://www.disabledparents.net/?page_id=89
- " *Manage Irritability and Anger:* Learning strategies to manage stress can help you control anger and irritability. Noticing when you are becoming angry and taking a short break from the situation can help you calm down. If it is difficult to control your anger on your own or if your anger is impacting your parenting, you should discuss these problems with your doctor, a psychologist, or other rehabilitation professional.
- " *Managing Depression and Anxiety:* If you are experiencing sadness, depression, or anxiety, you should discuss these feelings with your doctor. It is important to seek help early, especially if feelings of depression and anxiety affect your parenting or your relationship with your children. Medications and psychotherapy/counseling can help treat mental health problems after TBI. Ask your doctor to recommend a psychologist, therapist, or other mental health professional who is also familiar with TBI.



SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS WITH TBI continued...

- " *Family Therapy:* Consider family therapy. Family therapy is a type of psychotherapy/counseling that includes multiple members of a family. Family therapy can help families cope with stressful events, improve communication, manage family conflicts, and strengthen family relationships. You can locate a licensed Family Therapist in your geographic area on the following website: <http://www.aamft.org>

- " *Parenting Skills Classes:* Consider taking a parenting skills class. These classes teach you new ways to manage common parenting issues, which can increase your confidence with parenting.
 - If you live in Texas, you can locate Parenting Skills classes in your area on the following website:
<https://www.211texas.org/zf/taxonomy/detail/id/648340>

 - If you live outside of Texas, you can call the National Parenting Helpline 1-855-4A PARENT (1-855-427-2736) for assistance in locating a Parenting Skills class in your area.

- " *Safety:* It is important for all parents to provide a safe home environment for their children. The following website provides information about child safety issues. The information covers all age groups from newborns to teenagers, such as childproofing your home and protecting your child from drugs and alcohol:
<https://www.cdc.gov/parents/index.html>



FURTHER RESOURCES FOR PARENTS WITH TBI

The following resources provide additional information that may be helpful for parents with TBI.

Parenting with a Disability

Through the Looking Glass
<https://lookingglass.org>

Parents with Disabilities Online
<http://www.disabledparents.net>

Disability Resources on the Internet
<http://www.disabilityresource.org/>

*The Parenting with a Disability
Network (PDN)*
<https://www.cilt.ca/programs-and-services/parenting-with-a-disability-network/>

General Parenting Skill and Support

The American Academy of Pediatrics
<http://www.healthychildren.org>

Kids Health
<http://kidshealth.org>

National Parent Helpline
1-855-4A PARENT
<http://www.nationalparenthelpline.org>

Triple P Positive Parenting Program
<http://www.triplep-parenting.net>

Zero to Three
<http://www.zerotothree.org>

Parenting Support in the Houston Area

The ARK Group
<http://www.thearkgroup.org/parents/>

713-471-8922

AVANCE
<http://www.avancehouston.org>
713-812-0033

DePelchin Children's Center
<http://www.depelchin.org/parent-education/>
713-730-2335

ESCAPE Family Resource Center
<http://www.learntoparent.org>
713-942-9500

Family Houston
<https://www.familyhouston.org/>
713-861-4849

General Information on TBI

Brain Injury Association of America
<http://www.biausa.org>

*Brain Injury Association of America/Texas
Division*
<https://www.biausa.org/find-bia/texas>

Brain Line
<http://www.brainline.org>



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