



TBI TODAY

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

THE VIRGINIA TBIMS TEAM

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How Can I keep Asking Family Members and Friends for Help?

by Jeffrey Kreutzer

In the first few days and weeks after brain injury the family may appreciate the company of many visitors. Extended family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers come by to offer their best wishes. Some ask, "Is there anything I can do to help?"

After weeks or months the situation changes. Many family members feel increasingly isolated from their extended family and friends. Sometimes people stop offering help. Sometimes the injured person's family members avoid asking for help.

Ask family members of survivors and maybe they'll tell you they're uncomfortable asking for help because:

"Nobody cares about anyone else; it's every man, woman, or dog for themselves in this world!"

"People are sick of me asking for help."

"Asking for help is a sign of weakness."

"My friends have more important things to do than help me."

Sound familiar? Realize that asking for help may not be as negative as you think. At least some caring family members and friends may see your request for help as a positive sign. Asking for help:

- lets people know that you value their support and involvement
- lets people who care about you know how you're doing
- provides an opportunity to build relationships with people who like helping
- shows recognition of your limitations
- allows you an opportunity to reduce your frustration and more effectively carry out your many responsibilities
- gives you a chance to be part of a team; later you'll find yourself in a position to help other people. (contd on page 6)

This article is adapted from *Getting Better After Brain Injury: A Guide for Families, Friends, and Caregivers*, a publication of the National Resource Center for TBI at Virginia Commonwealth University, and is available for purchase. For more information, please visit www.tbinc.com/store under the Practical Idea Series or call (804) 828-3704.

Double Reminders To Improve Your Memory

by Mike Cerreto

During a recent session, a patient with a brain injury discussed how she forgets things when leaving the house. Sometimes she forgets her purse, lists, phone, and even her kids one time. Memory during transitions from one place to another is complex because you need to hold information in memory while transitioning to a different setting. The transition from one place to another can overload the mind because you need to remember what you are going to do while still focusing on what you are currently doing.

To help her better remember important things before leaving the house, we developed a three-word mantra she says each time she leaves:

"Kids, Phone, Purse."

However, sometimes she forgets to say the mantra. So she came up with an ingenious idea. As the picture shows, she attached textured plastic to her car key to remind her to say the mantra before getting into her car. It worked like a charm. What a great fallback way to have a "double" reminder when leaving her house.



Is there something you forget in your life that you can create a unique reminder for each day? If so, you should also develop a second method that reminds you to use it.

Michael Cerreto, MS, CPCRT, CSC, LDR is a Certified Cognitive Rehabilitation Therapist with A Talented Mind Clinic in Richmond, Virginia. He helps children, adolescents, and adults with a traumatic brain injury improve the quality of their lives. He is also the author of three books, *Journey Back From Chemobrain*, *Mental Toughness In Athletes*, and *University of YOU*, that are available on Amazon. If you have any ideas for a future article about cognitive rehabilitation, please contact Michael at 804-337-1884 or cerreto@atalentedmind.com.

Mark Your Calendar!



Supportive Survivors

- ◆ **When:** Tuesdays 6-8pm
- ◆ **Location:** Usually at the Regency Mall Food Court (Richmond)
- ◆ **Contact:** Contact Ted Taylor at (804) 852-6644 or taylorsted58@yahoo.com

Richmond Aphasia Support Group

- ◆ **Location:** 1st Thursday of every month from 6-7pm at First Unitarian Universalist Church, 1000 Blanton Ave, Richmond, VA 23221
- ◆ **Contact:** (804) 439-2657 or email at ricaphasia@yahoo.com

Richmond Support Group for Adults with TBI, Family, Friends

- ◆ **Location:** 3rd Monday every month at 6:15pm, Children's Hospital Auditorium, 2924 Brook Road, Richmond, VA 23220
- ◆ **Contact:** Christine Baggini, (804) 355-5748

Brain Injury Association of Virginia Annual Conference: Making Headway

- ◆ **Location:** Hilton Richmond Hotel: Short Pump
- ◆ **When:** March 10-11, 2017
- ◆ **Details:** Preconference workshop for professionals March 10, annual conference March 11. Please visit www.bia.vnet/bia-v-conference.htm for more info or call 1-800-444-6443,

Looking for a support group in your area? Check out www.bia.vnet/virginia-support-groups.htm for more support groups organized by region!

If you have an upcoming event of interest to the Brain Injury community in Virginia, we would be glad to consider including it here. Please call 828-3703 or email jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org.

Survivor Stories Wanted!

Recovering from a brain injury can be very difficult. Sometimes, one of the most helpful and inspiring things is simply hearing from other survivors who have gone through recovery and faced the same challenges. Are you a survivor with a story you'd like to share? If so, then we'd like to hear it, and it might get into a future issue of TBI Today!

Submit to: jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org

or

TBI Today, VCU P.O. Box 980542
Richmond, VA 23298-0542



HAVE YOU MET AMMA AGYEMANG, PHD, MPH?

Amma Agyemang, PhD, MPH is a new Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). She will contribute to clinical research and clinical activities that focus on the evaluation and treatment of persons with neurological disorders.

Amma was born in Kumasi, Ghana and moved to Herndon, VA in 1997. She earned her PhD in Clinical Psychology at VCU with an emphasis on behavioral medicine. In July 2016, she completed her clinical internship in behavioral medicine at the Medical University of South Carolina, with rotations in oncology and the sleep and anxiety clinic. Amma’s research interests include understanding and addressing psychiatric comorbidities in the context of medical illness, particularly in minority and underserved populations. In her dissertation, she examined the feasibility of implementing a web-based cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia program for individuals newly diagnosed with cancer at the Massey Cancer Center.

When not at work, Amma enjoys spending time with friends and family. She also has a 10-lb-dog named Bella, who is quite the globetrotter, having hailed from Paraguay. Amma is currently training for her next half-marathon in December.



Halloween Word Scramble

Just in time for Fall, see if you can unscramble all twenty words below. One big clue: they all have to do with Halloween and the Fall season. Answers on page 6!

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. SAMUEENTM _____ | 16. SGTSOH _____ |
| 2. LPSEPA _____ | 17. BONLGI _____ |
| 3. TAUUMN _____ | 18. NALLWOHEE _____ |
| 4. BAST _____ | 19. TSAHREV _____ |
| 5. CAKBL _____ | 20. RHADIEY _____ |
| 6. OBO _____ | |
| 7. NCAYD _____ | |
| 8. TCA _____ | |
| 9. TECSUSMO _____ | |
| 10. LACARDU _____ | |
| 11. IEERE _____ | |
| 12. EXTEMNEICT _____ | |
| 13. KNNIRTEEANSF _____ | |
| 14. RGITNEFH _____ | |
| 15. MGASE _____ | |



JUST FOR FUN



CHAT WITH PAT

Pat answers your personal questions about brain injury with compassion and practical advice. However, advice from Pat's column should not be substituted for consultation with a doctor or rehabilitation specialist. The identity of individuals submitting questions to "Chat with Pat" is kept strictly confidential.

DEAR PAT: Our 26-year-old daughter was badly hurt in a motorcycle accident 3 years ago. She broke a leg and both arms, had bruises from head to toe, and had a massive brain hemorrhage. There was a time when we didn't think she would make it. Luckily, she had great surgeons that literally saved her life. We were filled with hope during her quick physical recovery. What has been most difficult has been watching her mental struggle with the effects of a brain injury. Even after all this time, she still forgets everyday things, has trouble keeping up with conversations, and gets tired so fast.

Since she was discharged from the hospital and finished treatment, my husband and I have been taking care of her at home. We love our daughter very much and would do anything to help her get better. I have noticed, though, that her temper is much shorter since the accident. She argues with my husband about everything. In her defense, my husband likes to tell her what to do and how to do things. I think he has a hard time letting her make her own decisions and

mistakes. I know my daughter is growing more angry and resentful about the way she is being treated. What can I do, Pat, to keep the peace at home between my daughter and husband?



Pat's Response:

Wanting the members of your family to be happy and to get along is a natural response. I bet your motherly instincts about conflicts between your daughter and husband are right on target. The trick, however, is to avoid being the target! In other words, when family members argue, some unlucky person may find herself caught in the middle. During stressful times, you may also feel extra pressure to help everyone in the family get along.

Realizing that your family has been through a series of stressful events since your daughter was injured is important. First, you and your husband were faced with the possibility that she may not survive the accident. Second, you were concerned about her mental recovery once her physical health was restored. Lastly, you have seen signs of lingering cognitive and emotional problems that are worrisome.

You and your husband may also be under stress because of the responsibilities of taking care of your daughter. Assuming she was living on her own before the

accident, you and your husband had probably just gotten used to having an "empty nest" when she moved back home. Having an adult child in the home after a period of absence would be a significant change for any couple. Also, the strain of caregiving should not be overlooked. Relatives providing care to persons with brain injury may find the responsibility rewarding but burdensome. Adjusting to these life-altering changes is understandably difficult for your family.

Following a brain injury, survivors are more vulnerable to stress of daily hassles as well as major life changes. That's one reason why people with brain injury often have trouble controlling frustration and anger. There are a number of constructive ways to cope with anger problems that survivors and their families have shared with me over the years. To help your daughter increase her self-control, try the following ideas other survivors and their families have found helpful:

- * Encourage her to be positive and sensitive to others' feelings. Remind her to explain herself calmly. Doing so will make it easier for others to understand and help.

- * Help your daughter remember that controlling anger will improve relationships with family and friends.

- * Encourage your daughter and husband to take a "time out" and try to relax when angry feelings start to build. Helpful strategies include breathing deeply and slowly or counting to ten before speaking or acting.

* Identify trouble situations, people, and places that bring out your daughter's anger. Make a plan to deal with trouble situations and practice the plan ahead of time.

* Be a good role model and encourage your husband to do the same. Teach good anger management skills by using them yourself.

Patients and families may need additional help during especially

stressful times. Talking to extended family members, friends, or professionals can benefit families with complex and challenging issues as the ones you have described. For example, you may consider asking others for help in caregiving. A short break or chance for respite often makes it easier for family caregivers to cope over the long term. You may also wish to contact the Brain Injury Association of America (BIAA). BIAA offers a tele-

phone helpline for families (1-800-444-6443) as a nationwide source of information and referral services. For emotional support, participating in a local support group for persons with brain injury and their families is another possibility. The Brain Injury Association of Virginia (BIAV; 804-355-5748 or 1-800-334-8443) provides information about support groups and other useful services for survivors of brain injury and families.

JUST THE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

THE INFORMATION PROVIDED IN THE FAQ IS INTENDED TO FAMILIARIZE THE PUBLIC WITH ISSUES RELATED TO TBI. NO INFORMATION PROVIDED HEREIN SHOULD BE CONSTRUED AS THERAPEUTIC ADVICE OR AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR CONSULTATION WITH A COMPETENT MEDICAL OR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL.

Q: I often forget what I'm looking for when I enter a room. What can I do about this problem?

A: Forgetting what you are looking for is a common problem reported by persons who have had a brain injury. Here are some strategies for remembering what you are looking for:

- Avoid trying to do too many things at once. It is much easier to forget or get confused when you are trying to do different things at the same time.
- Repetition. Repetition. Repetition. Repeat the name of the object of your search over and over until you find it.
- Write down what you are looking for. Even just one word may be enough to trigger your recall. If paper is not handy, write on your hand. If a pen is not handy, "write" with your finger.
- Take something with you to remind you what you are looking for. For example, if you are looking for your checkbook, take the bill you intend to pay.
- "Retrace your steps." For some, going back to the "scene of the crime" helps them recall what they are looking for.
 - Walk back to the last place you remember being. Look all around.
 - Try to form a picture in your mind of what you were doing. Were you sitting or standing? Were you alone or with someone?
 - Pantomime or "act out" what you were doing (e.g., writing something down, opening a drawer, leafing through a book).



*Questions for Pat or the FAQ column are welcomed.
Send them to: "ASK PAT" OR "FAQ"
P.O. BOX 980542. RICHMOND, VA 23298-0542
or e-mail: jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org*



(*Asking for Help*, contd) The “Bottom Line” is that the injury has left you and your family members with disadvantages. Asking for help may be the only way to effectively carry out your responsibilities, meet your personal needs, and make your family stronger.

“So how and when should I ask for help?” Great question! Here are some ideas:

- Politely. Ask someone you trust if you can talk to them. Be specific about your difficulty. Ask for assistance. Allow them to feel comfortable declining or accepting your request.
- Whether they agree or decline to help, thank them for their time spent listening.
- Recognize that the other person has something important to offer, their time and expertise.
- Ask for help before the problem gets out of hand.

Most people don’t ask for a favor in return. Still, you and other immediate family members can do something that can help you both to feel better. Look for the opportunity to do something simple and inexpensive to convey your gratitude - a few kind words, bake them some cookies, offer to take their pet for a walk, a cup of coffee, hold the door, or get them a greeting card.

How do you handle situations where other people offer more help than you’d like?

Accepting help may seem awkward or difficult. **Maybe you feel...**

- That people will see you as incompetent?
- Embarrassed about not being able to handle your personal responsibilities?
- Concerned that other people feel superior to you?
- Afraid that others might pity you?
- Like you’re being watched?
- Uncomfortable that people don’t trust your ability to carry out your responsibilities?



People who offer help care about you. Maybe they see your frustration and want to make your life easier. Think carefully before you turn down help from a caring person with good intentions. Anger or irritation in response to an offer of help is a sure way to make things go downhill fast.

If you turn down help, consider telling the person who is offering that...

- their kind-hearted offer is appreciated
- you’d like to take a “rain check,” and will turn to them for help in the future
- you are trying to solve problems on your own and learn from experience (good and bad).

10. Dracula	20. hayride
9. costumes	19. harvest
8. cat	18. Halloween
7. candy	17. goblin
6. boo	16. ghosts
5. black	15. games
4. bats	14. frighten
3. autumn	13. Frankenstein
2. apples	12. excitement
1. amusement	11. eerie

Here are the word scramble answers.
How did you do?

Join a Supportive Online Community for TBI Survivors and Families

The Comeback Project is a free, private online community for survivors of brain injury and their families to help you get your life back after a brain injury. You can join the community to share and get the support you need at: a-talented-mind.mightybell.com.

The community is provided by A Talented Mind Clinic in Richmond, Virginia, that provides cognitive rehabilitation therapy to brain injury survivors and families. For more information, you may also email Mike Cerreto at cerreto@atalentedmind.com.

SKILL-BUILDING, SUPPORTIVE AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR COUPLES AFTER BRAIN INJURY PARTICIPANTS INVITED!

Are you in a relationship? Have you or your partner had an acquired brain injury?

You May Qualify for an Ongoing Research Study!

Virginia Commonwealth University researchers in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation are seeking adults with brain injuries to be part of a research study. We are evaluating the helpfulness of an outpatient rehabilitation program to help couples adjust to brain injury. Qualified volunteers will participate in five to six support and education sessions. Study volunteers will be given information on brain injury, local resources, skills development, and positive coping strategies. Volunteers will also be asked to complete several questionnaires. Participants must be at least 18 years old. There is no charge for services and volunteers are compensated for their time.

If you are interested in participating, please call Jenny Marwitz at 804-828-3704 or toll free at 866-296-6904 or email jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org

Say hello to our new editor! After this issue, Abby Welch will be taking over editorial duties for *TBI Today* as our long-time staff member Melissa Jackson pursues her Masters' in Social Work.

Have questions about the newsletter? Email Abby at abigail.welch@vcuhealth.org or Jennifer Marwitz at jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org.

Has Your Balance Been Affected by a Concussion, Head or Brain Injury?

If so, You May Qualify for This Clinical Research Trial.

- Are you 18-65 years of age?
- Have experienced a concussion, head or brain injury, over 1 year ago?
- Have difficulty with balance?
- Did not lose consciousness for more than 24 hours when you were injured?

Compensation is available for qualified participants.

To learn more about this trial:

visit: BrainInjuryTrial.com

call: **1-877-844-4960**



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Go to <http://model.tbinc.com> to subscribe by email and to access back issues!



Founded in 1983 by families and concerned professionals, the Brain Injury Association of Virginia is the only statewide non-profit organization in Virginia exclusively devoted to serving individuals with brain injury, their families, and those that care for and about them. Over 10,000 people find help from BIAV each year.

BIAV is a chartered state affiliate of the Brain Injury Association of America and exists to be the voice of brain injury through help, hope and healing for Virginians with brain injury and their families. We educate human service professionals and the community on the risks and impact of brain injury and advocate for improved medical and community-based services. Many of our staff members are Certified Brain Injury Specialists (CBIS Certified).

To find out more information about BIAV, contact us at 1-800-444-6443 or 804-355-5748. Or visit our website at www.biav.net.



The Voice of Brain Injury: *Help, Hope & Healing*