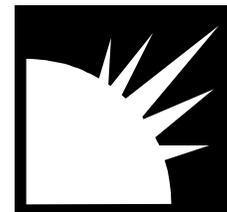


# TBI TODAY

NEWS, IDEAS, AND RESOURCES FROM THE VIRGINIA TBI MODEL SYSTEM



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## Keep It Simple: *Make your cognitive rehabilitation simple and specific*

by Michael Cerreto

A traumatic brain injury brings many changes to your life overnight. You look down the road of recovery and may see a long list of mental abilities you need to improve to enhance your life. To determine the improvements to tackle first, you should explore your experience with the small areas of your daily life, such as using a phone, remembering to eat meals, or operating a microwave oven. The secret is to start small and keep your choices simple and specific so you experience momentum and success.

Clarity about what you want to improve in life after a TBI is important. By keeping it simple, you and your family will stay focused on what truly matters for your overall wellbeing. You should also treat your rehabilitation as a series of small projects that have a beginning, middle, and mastery at the end.

For example, if you want to learn how to use a microwave again, put numbered post-it notes for each step with arrows pointing to the buttons in sequence. Use the oven each day by following the post-it notes until you feel comfortable. Then start taking one post-it note away each week or so to test your memory until you no longer need them.

It is normal for people to feel overwhelmed when personal changes look big and complicated. By targeting small aspects of your daily life and creating mini-projects for them, you will feel more in control.

Ask yourself:

- \* *What one small part of my daily life do I want to perform better in a healthy, constructive way?*
- \* *How will that change improve my daily life?*
- \* *What are the steps I need to take to improve that part of my life?*
- \* *How can I stay motivated to improve?*

By keeping your cognitive rehabilitation changes small and simple, you can enhance your success, motivation, and life.

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 TBI improve the quality of their daily lives. He also facilitates **The Comeback Project** that is a free, private online community for brain injury survivors and their families. You can join the community to get the support you need at: [a-talented-mind.mightybell.com](http://a-talented-mind.mightybell.com). If you have any ideas for a future article about cognitive rehabilitation, please contact Michael at [cerreto@atalentedmind.com](mailto:cerreto@atalentedmind.com).





# Mark Your Calendar

## Aphasia Support Group

- ◆ **When:** 2nd Thursday of the month 6-7pm
- ◆ **Location:** First Unitarian Universalist Church, 1000 Blanton Ave, Richmond, 23221 in the President's Room
- ◆ **Contact:** Susan Hapala at (804) 908-3261 or Jan Thomas at rva.aphasia@gmail.com

## Support Group for Adults with TBI, Family, and Friends

- ◆ **When:** 3rd Monday of the month 6:15pm-7:45pm
- ◆ **Location:** Disability Law Center of Virginia, 1512 Willow Lawn Drive, Suite 100, Richmond, 23230
- ◆ **Contact:** Christine Baggini at (804) 355-5748 or christine@biav.net

## Supportive Survivors

- ◆ **When:** 2nd, 4th, and 5th Tuesdays 6-8pm, Outings planned for the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays
- ◆ **Location:** Regency Mall Food Court, 1420 Parham Road, Richmond, 23229
- ◆ **Contact:** Ted Taylor at (804) 781-2144 or taylorted58@yahoo.com

## TGIF: Social Group for Adults with TBI and Family

- ◆ **When:** 1st Friday of the month
- ◆ **Contact:** Email Aleana McClellan at mcclellana@chesterfield.gov or call (804) 751-4134 to get on the mailing list.

## Women's Luncheon Group

- ◆ **When:** 2nd Tuesday of the month for lunch 11:30am
- ◆ **Location:** The Mill House, 7812 Shrader Road, Henrico 23294
- ◆ **Contact:** Jen Candela at (804) 386-0926 x 104 or jenniferc@communitybraininjury.org

Looking for a support group in your area? Check out [www.biav.net/virginia-support-groups.htm](http://www.biav.net/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 (804) 828-3704 or email [jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org](mailto:jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org).*

## Learning to overcome obstacles by Janelle Charlemagne

In March of 2017, I relocated back to Virginia after living in Kentucky and Indiana for almost seven years. I transferred jobs at Amazon from the site in Jeffersonville to the site in Chester. Well, things didn't work out for me at the Chester site. I left a much bigger and more advanced site with a better management team and a larger facility in Jeffersonville, whereas the Chester site was a smaller facility where management and staff members work on different levels. On top of that, I was in a different state, with different ways of doing things. After four months, I stopped working at the Chester site. I applied and interviewed for so many different jobs; however, I was over-qualified for many listings (I have a bachelor's degree from the University of Louisville). My life was an emotional rollercoaster as days turned into weeks, and weeks turned into a total of months of being unemployed. In addition, I had to reestablish myself in Virginia. I continued working on getting my priorities together, and I hung on to the positive side of fear, which, for me, is to:

**Face**

*Everything around me*

*And*

*Rise above all negative notions*

During those five months, I dealt with rejections upon rejections in the job market, but I didn't give up. I kept in mind "can't never could," so I could avoid telling myself that I couldn't.

My challenges through obstacles and circumstances kept stacking up on me, however I turned these obstacles into my stepping stones to create a better life to achieve my personal and professional goals. I considered things from every angle, kept moving forward, and found ways to relax my mind while I listened to inspirational songs and read finance books.

I kept faith alive and set goals to focus on solutions rather than stress, because life is full of contradictions and secret frustrations. I didn't allow myself to be discouraged, but I looked back at all the accomplishments I achieved as a traumatic brain injury survivor. My brain injury experience is about overcoming challenges and obstacles. Obstacles can add to how difficult challenges can be. As I continue to learn new ways, I have reasonable potential to reach my ultimate goals and to continue to decrease negative thinking as I continue to manage my time and choices. *(Cont'd on page 5)*



*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.*

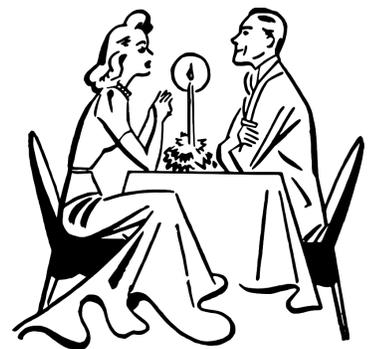
Survivors of brain injury often write me about making new friends and dating after injury. Developing friendships and dating are difficult enough without having to deal with the physical, cognitive, and emotional challenges associated with a brain injury. Problems with word-finding and language often cause anxiety when communicating with others. A crowded, noisy restaurant can distract from holding a conversation over dinner or can just be overstimulating. Difficulty interpreting body language or subtle nuances may also be an issue. As such, social isolation and withdrawal are common following TBI.

Now that the weather is getting nicer, Pat would like to encourage those who are interested in making friends and/or finding a partner to get out there! Recruit your family and close friends to help you. You can reduce anxiety and avoid potentially embarrassing interactions by role-playing with someone you trust. For example, you can practice asking someone out for an afternoon coffee/tea with your brother or sister or being on a first date with your best friend.

To help you get started, here are...

## ***Pat's secrets to making friends and dating after brain injury: Important lessons from real experiences***

- When you call to make plans, have a clear plan of what to do.
- No matter what your friends say, hygiene is important.
- Watch your temper. Nothing turns a person off more than seeing you yell at the waiter.
- Keep your hands to yourself. Ask before you touch.
- Don't talk too much about yourself.
- Don't tell everyone stories about your underwear or noises you can make.
- Think before you speak.
- Don't get drunk.
- Don't make noise when you eat.
- If you invite, you pay.
- Don't talk about sex on the first (and probably the second and third) date.

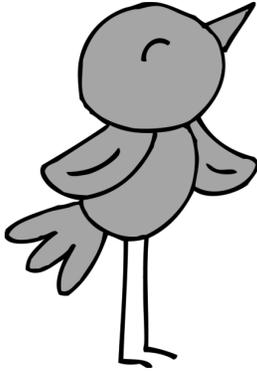


Good luck! Please write to share your stories!

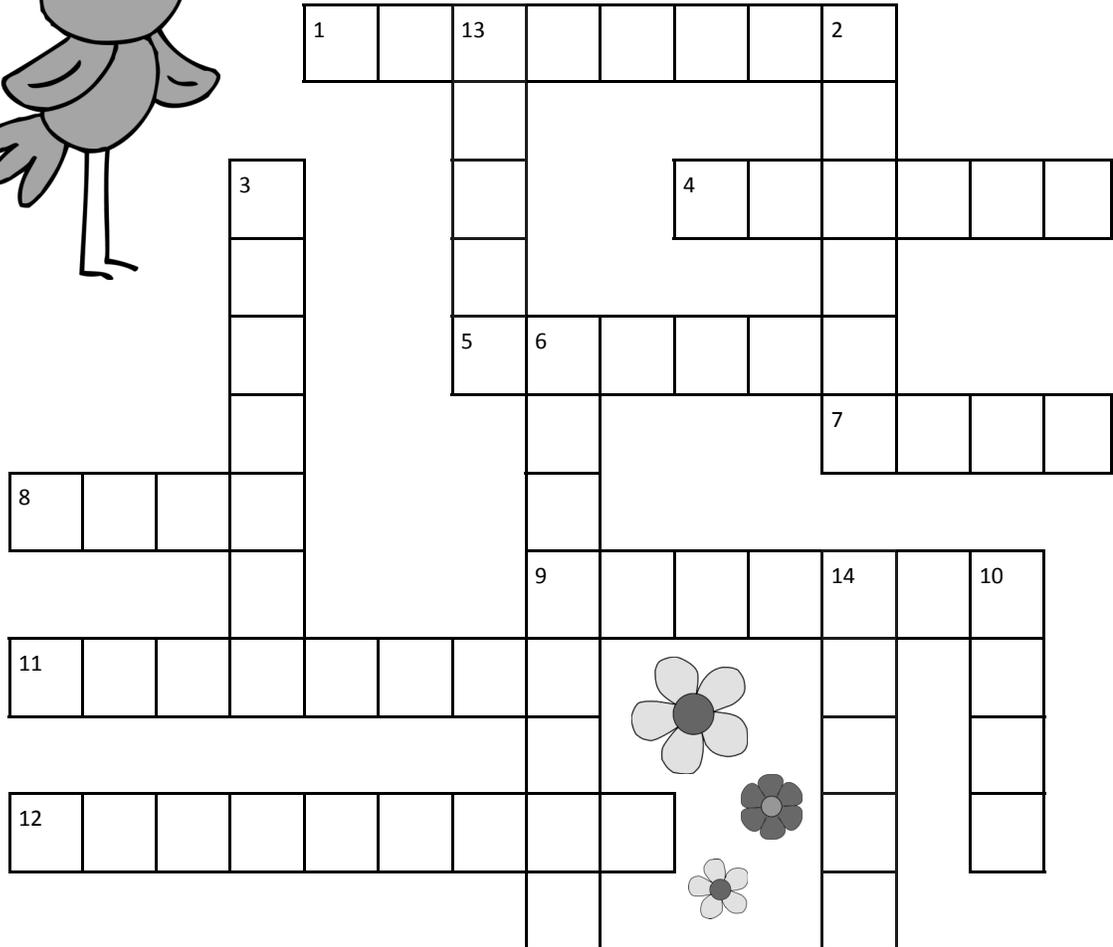
Support groups are also a great way to get feedback from others. Your local Brain Injury Association of America likely has a list of support groups you may attend. To contact BIAA, you may call their family helpline (1-800-444-6443) or send them an e-mail at [familyhelpline@biausa.org](mailto:familyhelpline@biausa.org). The website for BIAA ([www.biausa.org](http://www.biausa.org)) provides links to state chapters and additional brain injury resources. You may also write BIAA for more information at 1608 Spring Hill Road, Suite 110, Vienna, VA 22182.

# Spring Crossword

Can you solve this Spring Crossword? If you get stumped, answers can be found on page 7!



JUST FOR FUN



## Across

1. Baby duck
4. To begin to grow
5. Small pool of water
7. Birds rest in their \_\_\_\_\_
8. Fun to fly on a windy day
9. Can be seen after a storm
11. Gives light to help plants grow
12. Insect with colorful wings

## Down

2. A place to grow plants in your yard
3. April showers bring May \_\_\_\_\_
6. Protects you from the rain
10. Not too cold, not too hot
13. Birds make this sound
14. No school during spring \_\_\_\_\_

*(Learning, cont'd)*

I continue to look beyond my inner and outer obstacles and acknowledge what possibilities lie ahead. When I get discouraged, I remind myself how far God has brought me, as well as how far I have recovered as a traumatic brain injury survivor, and my accomplishments through the years.

The one good thing about my relocation is that I had a “just in case” plan. I used my savings to help me with my bills for a few months. We all need to practice saving. If I did not have money saved, I would be in deep debt. Before I relocated, I paid my car insurance for a whole year, and I stayed on top of my bills. My financial struggle only came during the last two months of unemployment.

I also went to the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) where I worked with a vocational rehabilitation counselor. She was helping me with job placement, but I was still over qualified or rejected. She told me about Kelly Services in Mechanicsville, VA. I went there to apply for their services and spoke with a senior recruiter. I could have gone through their website; however, I think it’s often better to apply in person to get help with a job placement. While I kept in contact with Kelly Services for job updates, I continued searching for jobs on my own.

Eventually, Kelly Services had two positions available that were of interest to me. There was one with Ricoh and one with FedEx, and I applied for both as a temporary worker with Kelly Services. Ricoh, an electronics company, was my first choice. I interviewed with them, but I wasn’t hired. I am so happy I chose FedEx as a back-up because I got the job!

During my first week of work as a Kelly Services temporary employee for FedEx, I decided to apply for a permanent position. My vocational rehabilitation counselor helped me complete the application. After my FedEx manager observed me on the job for a month, I was hired for a permanent position as a Handler. I’ve been working there for six months now and I love it!

Through my progress over the years, I always make sure to leave room for growth and improvement in my life. I work hard to turn any tragedy into a triumph, as I continue to adjust to new opportunities.

[Editor’s Note: Many people find great resources in communities of faith. While TBI Today does not endorse any one particular belief system, we readily acknowledge and appreciate the important role that religion plays in the lives of many survivors of TBI.]

### 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](mailto:jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org)

or

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



### 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](http://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](mailto:cerreto@atalentedmind.com).



**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](mailto:jennifer.marwitz@vcuhealth.org)**



# ADJUSTMENT AND RESILIENCE BRAIN INJURY STUDY

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## Have you had a traumatic brain injury (TBI)? You May Qualify for a New Research Study!

Virginia Commonwealth University researchers are seeking adults with traumatic brain injuries to be part of a research study. We are evaluating the helpfulness of an outpatient rehabilitation program to help people adjust to having a brain injury. Qualified volunteers will participate in seven rehabilitation and education sessions and possibly three additional 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. All participants must be at least 18 years old.

During the sessions, the following topics will be discussed:

- Understanding the changes that normally follow brain injury
- How to improve recovery
- Goal setting for success
- Problem solving effectively
- Understanding and managing stress and intense emotions
- Communicating effectively and rebuilding relationships
- Maintaining a positive outlook

*There will be no charge for services.  
Volunteers will be **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](mailto:Jennifer.Marwitz@vcuhealth.org).

# 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.

## QUESTION:

What treatments are available to address headaches after traumatic brain injury?

## ANSWER:

Headaches are one of the most common complaints of TBI survivors. What can you do? Lifestyle changes to consider for preventing headaches:



- ◇ Get sufficient sleep (i.e., 7-9 hours).
- ◇ Under your physician’s guidance, incorporate exercise, such as walking and stretching, into your daily schedule.
- ◇ Avoid drinking caffeinated beverages.
- ◇ Avoid consuming certain foods that have been known to trigger a headache, like red wine, MSG (a common food additive), or certain cheeses.
- ◇ Manage stress.

It is important to discuss treatment options with your doctor. Common treatment for headaches include the following:

- ◇ Over-the-counter pain medicines (e.g., acetaminophen or ibuprofen)
- ◇ Prescription medicines
- ◇ Relaxation or meditation practice
- ◇ Biofeedback therapy
- ◇ Stretching and self-massage
- ◇ Acupuncture
- ◇ Local injections
- ◇ Therapeutic massage
- ◇ Heat or ice packs



Information provided here is not meant to replace advice from a medical professional.

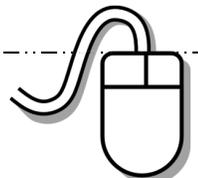
Here are the answers to the crossword on page 4. How did you do?

13. CHIRP	2. GARDEN	8. KITE
14. BREAK	3. FLOWERS	9. RAINBOW
	6. UMBRELLA	11. SUNSHINE
	10. WARM	12. BUTTERFLY
		7. NEST
		5. PUDDLE
		4. SPROUT
		1. DUCKLING

**Across**

**Down**

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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](http://www.biav.net).



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