

# TBI TODAY

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

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## Managing Life After TBI Presents: Using Lists to Organize, Part 2

By Emilie Godwin

Life after brain injury can get better, but you will probably need to live life very differently than you did before. Making lists can be one way to help you learn how to manage life differently. Before brain injury, you probably did a lot of organizing inside of your head. You can learn to do that organizing outside of your head by making lists. Learning new ways to organize will help you to do more of the things you would like to do now.

Here are even more methods of keeping lists that will help you to accomplish more and, once you are used to a new system, get frustrated less!

### \*\*Step-By-Step List\*\*

Although you will be writing small, manageable tasks one by one on your "To Do Soon" List, you may still need to break these tasks down into smaller steps to get them done. Each time you start a new 4-star task, do not begin working on that task until you have created a step-by-step list for it.

On a separate piece of paper, write the task at the top. For example, you might write "Schedule my next appointment with my Physiatrist." Write the following words on the paper, leaving room underneath each word to add information: Things I need / Help I need / Steps.

Under "Things I need" write everything you can think of that you will need to accomplish the task. Do not leave anything out, even if it seems like you would remember that you need it.

For the example above, you might write: "Telephone, Daily Planner, Doctor's phone number and name, Insurance card".

Under "Help I need" write any help that you will need from others before you can finish the task. In this example, you may need to write: "Get phone number from my wife" and "Ask my wife what days and times she is available or not available to drive me to an appointment."

(contd on page 2)



(*Making Lists contd from page 1*) Under "Steps", break the task down into the smallest steps you can think of. Following our example, you may write:

1. Get stuff from my "Things I need" list
2. Ask my "Help I need" questions
3. Sit down in a quiet room with all of the information and items I need
4. Open my calendar to this month
5. Call my doctor's office and ask for an appointment with Dr. Smith
6. Answer receptionist's questions
7. Decide on an appointment time with the receptionist
8. After hanging up, write my appointment in my calendar
9. Tell my wife when the appointment day and time is so she can put it on her calendar

Now, you are ready to start your task! Using your "Steps" list, which should always begin with #1 and #2 from the list above, go step by step through the task. As you finish a step, mark it off with a pen.

### \*\* "Big Goals" List \*\*

Sometimes after brain injury, survivors can get "distracted" when they think of a big goal they have. They may try right then to begin working on this goal, but often do not know what steps to take. Many people become quickly overwhelmed and give up. The "Big Goals" list will help to make sure you do not lose track of your long-term goals, but will allow you to set them aside while you work on smaller steps that will help to get you to your bigger goals in the future.

This list is not for daily chores or activities, but instead is for bigger things that you would like to do or goals you hope to eventually accomplish. However, as your "To Do Soon" list gets smaller when you finish tasks, you may wish to use the "Big Goals" list to give you ideas for new things you need to do.

This list should be made up of two columns. In the first column, write the "Big Goal" that you would like to reach one day. Next to this goal, in the other column, keep a list of the steps that will help you to get there. Each time you add a Big Goal, leave plenty of lines or space underneath, so that you can add in steps to reaching that goal as you think of them. Your "Big Goals" list may look something like this:

<b>Big Goal:</b>	<b>Steps To Take:</b>
<b>Go Back to School:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Get cleared by doctor to return to school <input type="checkbox"/> Fill out an application <input type="checkbox"/> Speak with counselor about classes <input type="checkbox"/> Get transcripts from my old schools <input type="checkbox"/> Sign up for placement tests

Remember that this list is really a place for you to keep track of ideas. The items on this list will be bigger goals that you will want to work on at some point down the road. When you have room on your "To Do Soon" list, or when you feel you are ready to start moving toward a "Big Goal", take out this list. Pick one item from the column on the right ("Steps to take") and see if you need to break it down even smaller. These small steps can be moved on to your "To Do Soon" list and you can begin to tackle them, one at a time.

When you have an idea related to one of your Big Goals, take the time to go and write the idea on your list. This will help to reduce any anxiety you have that you might forget about your idea, and will help to keep you organized. If your goals change and you no longer want to work toward something on your list, simply cross it off. (*contd on page 7*)

# JUST FOR FUN!

See if you can unscramble the words below! All of them have to do with Winter. If you get stumped, answers are on page 6. No cheating!

1. RNEWIT \_\_\_\_\_
2. OLCD \_\_\_\_\_
3. INFEREGZ \_\_\_\_\_
4. BMEEDCER \_\_\_\_\_
5. YJURNAA \_\_\_\_\_
6. FABUERYR \_\_\_\_\_
7. CEI \_\_\_\_\_
8. RFOTS \_\_\_\_\_
9. NKLWASOFE \_\_\_\_\_
10. GLEVSO \_\_\_\_\_
11. ATH \_\_\_\_\_
12. TCAO \_\_\_\_\_
13. SOBOT \_\_\_\_\_
14. RAFCS \_\_\_\_\_
15. VLSHOE \_\_\_\_\_
16. LDGNDISE \_\_\_\_\_
17. INKSIG \_\_\_\_\_

## Mark Your Calendar!



### T.G.I.F.

- ◆ **Location:** 1st Friday of each month, Belmont Recreation Center, 1600 Hilliard Rd.
- ◆ **Description:** the local departments of recreation & parks host this monthly social event for survivors of brain injury, ages 18+
- ◆ **Contact:** Call Kariayn Smith, 804-501-5135, for more information and/or to be placed on the mailing list for monthly reminders.

### Richmond Support Group

- ◆ **Location:** 3rd Monday every month at 6 pm, Children's Hospital Auditorium, 2924 Brook Rd, Richmond, VA 23220
- ◆ **Contact:** Call the Richmond BIAV at 804-355-5748 for more info!

### Hopewell Tri-Cities Support Group

- ◆ **Location:** 2nd Tuesday every month at 6:30 pm, Nelson Library 209 East Cawson St, Hopewell VA 23860
- ◆ **Contact:** Call Mary Wallace at 804-355-5748 or email at mary@biav.net

### Chesterfield Support Group

- ◆ **Location:** 1st Monday every month at 6:30pm at the Woodlake United Methodist Church, 15640 Hampton Park Drive, Chesterfield VA 23832
- ◆ **Contact:** Call Elizabeth Perry-Varner at 804-276-5761 or email eperryvarner@verizon.net

### May 20-June 2, 2012

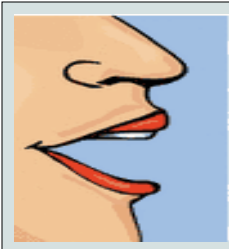
- ◆ **Event:** Camp Bruce McCoy
- ◆ **Location:** Triple-R Ranch, Chesapeake, VA
- ◆ **Contact:** Call 804-355-5748 or visit [www.biav.net](http://www.biav.net)

## 2012 Williamsburg Conference May 3-4, 2012

Professionals and caregivers who work with TBI survivors are invited to the 36th Annual 2012 Williamsburg Conference: Rehabilitation of the Adult and Child with Brain Injury: Practical Solutions to Real World Problems. For 2012, we have put together a very talented group of nationally and internationally renowned faculty.

Keynote presentations will focus on community-based interventions and sensory disorders in persons with TBI. Other topics include ambiguous loss, resilience, caregiver communication, behavior analysis, and sexuality.

For more information, go to [www.tbiconferences.org](http://www.tbiconferences.org) or contact Lisa Garver at 7033-451-8881 ext 224 or by email at [lgarver@braininjurysvcs.org](mailto:lgarver@braininjurysvcs.org).



## 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.*

Survivors of brain injury often write to me about dating after brain injury. Dating itself can be challenging enough without having to cope with the consequences of 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. Difficulty interpreting body language or subtle nuances is also an issue. As such, social isolation and withdrawal are common following TBI.

Pat would like to encourage those who are interested in dating and finding a partner to get out there! Recruit your family and close friends to help you. You can reduce anxiety and avoid embarrassing interactions by role-playing with someone you trust. For example, you can practice asking someone out on a date with your brother or sister or being on a first date with your best friend.

To get you started, here are...

### Pat's Secrets of Dating After Brain Injury: Important Lessons from Real Experiences!

- No matter what your friends say – hygiene is important!
- Watch your temper. Nothing turns a date off worse than seeing you yell at the waiter.
- Keep your hands to yourself. Always ask before you touch.
- Don't talk too much about yourself.
- Don't tell everyone stories about your underwear.
- Think before you speak.
- Men: you won't impress her by accurately guessing her real weight or age.
- Avoid alcohol. You'll probably get drunker than your date.
- Don't tell stories that begin with, "I was so drunk that..."
- Don't make noises when you eat.
- If you invite, you pay.
- Don't talk about sex on the first (and probably the second and third) date.
- When you ask for a first date, have a clear plan for what to do.



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.

# 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:** It has been difficult for me to cope with the changes in my husband after his brain injury. I am overwhelmed with everything I have to do to take care of him. What can I do to get through this process?

**A:** Coping with the personality changes of a loved one following a brain injury is very hard. It will be important to take care of yourself during this process. Here are some ways you can help yourself:

- Learn to focus on your successes, strengths, and resources.
- Be hopeful and say positive things (e.g., “We will make it through this,” “We’ve come so far.”)
- Avoid thinking about and making comparisons to how things were.
- Focus on what your loved one can do instead of what they can’t.
- Get to know this “different” person. Try to do fun things together.
- Talk to and spend time with people who care about you.
- Give up some old responsibilities when you take on new responsibilities.
- Give yourself breaks and learn when and how to ask for help.
- Remain active. Try to do things you enjoy.
- Talk with a professional about your concerns.

## Couples Needed for New Study

Doctors at VCU are studying how brain injury effects relationships between couples. Both the survivor of the brain injury and their partner will complete a set of questionnaires, be part of a series of focus groups, and do an exercise with photos.

To qualify for the study, couples must be in a committed relationship and have met prior to the injury. The nature of the injury must be non-progressive, such as a traumatic brain injury or a stroke. Both the survivor and partner must be willing to participate.

You will be compensated for your time, and may also qualify for travel reimbursement if certain conditions are met.

To participate or get more information, please contact Brittney Chappell at (804) 828-2377 or [bschappell@vcu.edu](mailto:bschappell@vcu.edu).



*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: [jhmarwit@vcu.edu](mailto:jhmarwit@vcu.edu)*



## Top Tips for Taking Care of Yourself After Brain Injury

Recovery after brain injury can be a great challenge. If you are a survivor, a family member, or a caregiver, taking care of yourself is a good way to speed recovery. We put together a list of top tips. The list is based on ideas from successful survivors and their family members. Review the list and try out the ideas that seem likely to be helpful.

- ❑ **REMEMBER, NO ONE IS AN ISLAND. ASK FOR HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT.** Everyone needs help at times in their lives, especially when facing new challenges. Let trusted family and friends help carry the load.
- ❑ **TAKE TIME OUT TO DO THINGS YOU ENJOY.** Read a book, go dancing, watch a movie, and spend time with people you like. You'll be happier and better able to cope with life's stresses if you take time to do things you enjoy!
- ❑ **SET ASIDE ALONE TIME.** We all need time alone to re-charge our batteries. Take a little time out each day to do something alone – take a bath, go for a walk, write in a journal, meditate.
- ❑ **PROTECT YOUR HEALTH.** Eat a balanced diet. Get enough sleep. Exercise regularly. Avoid alcohol and drugs. Follow up with your doctors regularly and take medications as prescribed.
- ❑ **GIVE YOURSELF CREDIT FOR THINGS YOU ACCOMPLISH.** Think about all that you have accomplished since your injury. Celebrate and reward yourself for setting goals and taking positive steps to reach your goals.
- ❑ **DON'T OVERLOAD YOURSELF.** When recovering from your injury, it is important to focus on one task at a time. Don't try to do too many things at once. Complete one project and then move on to the next.
- ❑ **KEEP TRACK OF YOUR STRESS LEVEL AND EMOTIONS.** Monitor them regularly, so you can get help and support as needed. If you are having a hard time knowing when you are stressed, ask a close family member or friend for their opinion. Talk about what signs of stress they notice in you.
- ❑ **ASK OTHERS HOW THEY HAVE COPEDED WITH DIFFICULT PROBLEMS.** Find a support group or a few trusted family members or friends. You can learn a lot from people who have also been through difficult times. Find out how others deal with problems. They may be able to save you time and pain.
- ❑ **BE KIND TO YOURSELF.** You have been through a number of very difficult situations. Give yourself credit for doing your best. Avoid calling yourself names or putting yourself down.

### Word Scramble Answer Key

17. Skiing  
16. Sledding  
15. Shovel  
14. Scarf  
13. Boots

12. Coat  
11. Hat  
10. Gloves  
9. Snowflake  
8. Frost  
7. Ice

6. February  
5. January  
4. December  
3. Freezing  
2. Cold  
1. Winter

(Making Lists cont from page 2)

### \*\* "I Have Finished..." List \*\*

The last list we suggest you include in your Log Book is a list of things you have completed. There are many reasons that this is a good list to include. First, people who are able to see their successes are much more likely to stay motivated. We all do much better when we feel we are making progress, and are more likely to continue to work hard if we can see how much we have accomplished. Secondly, this list helps to keep a record of how you are spending your time and what you are getting done. When you are feeling frustrated because you are working at a slower pace, a visit to the "I Have Finished..." List can help to remind you that you ARE accomplishing things, just on a different time-line than before your injury. Finally, this list can help you to make sure that you know when you have finished something and that you know longer need to try to keep track of it (for example, that doctor's appointment on your "To Do Soon" List).

You can decide how much detail you would like to include on this list. Some people prefer to include every step they accomplish, to get a more complete picture of what they have finished. For these people, each time an item is crossed off of either the "Step-by-Step" list or the "To Do Soon" list, they transfer the item to their "I Have Finished..." List. For others, writing down each step that is completed creates too much work, so they prefer to only write down tasks as they are crossed off of their "To Do Soon" list. Both people should also include items on their "Daily Calendar", such as doctor's appointments, meetings with friends, etc.

Keep a running list of these items as you finish them, and be sure to share with family members. You all can take time to celebrate your successes!

#### Example: Daily List Schedule

##### **7 a.m. Wake up:**

- Look over Daily Calendar. Plug time alarms into an electronic organizer if you use one.
- Put tasks on your "To Do Soon" List into order.

##### **8:30 a.m. First Task:**

- Look at the top task on your "To Do Soon" List. Create a "Step-by-Step" List to get you started.
- Start your first step.

##### **8:30 – 12:00:**

- As ideas for things you need to do now or today come to mind, write them on the bottom of your "To Do Soon" List. Do not get off-track – you will order your list again soon.
- If Big Goals or dreams come to mind, write them down on your "Big Goals" List, and then get back to your task at-hand.

##### **12:00:**

- Re-order your "To Do Soon" List. Do not look at old stars. Go through, one by one and re-star your list, then rewrite your list with your new order. If a new task came up during the morning that needs to be addressed, you can put that first on your list.
- If you have to stop a task that you were working on because a new task has become more important, make sure that your unfinished job is second on your list.

##### **5:00:**

- Re-order your "To Do Soon" List for the last time today.

##### **9:00:**

- Look through your "To Do Soon" and possibly your "Step-by-Step" Lists. Write anything you have crossed off on your "I Have Finished..." List.
- Look over your "Daily Calendar" for tomorrow. Remember to lay out anything you will need the next day.



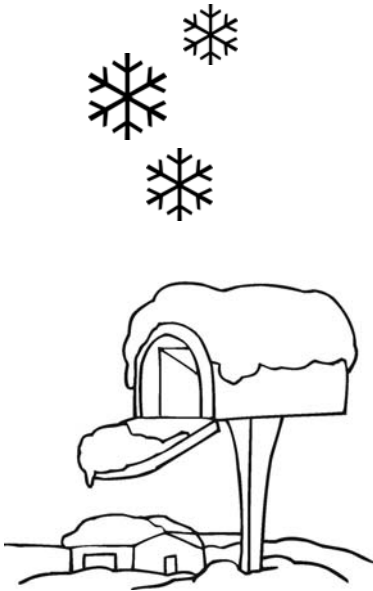
VCU, PM&R

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY MODEL SYSTEM

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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*