



TBI TODAY

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

THE VIRGINIA TBIMS TEAM

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Positive Research Findings: The Brain Injury Family Intervention

After brain injury, family members and survivors face many new and difficult challenges. For example, many people have trouble understanding the effects of injury, managing stress, setting reachable goals, and solving problems effectively. To help family members and survivors face challenges more successfully, clinical researchers at Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Center have developed a special program, the Brain Injury Family Intervention (BIFI).

The BIFI program was designed to give adult survivors and families the tools they need to help them recover. Trained counselors meet with each family, including the survivor, every other week for ten weeks. During each meeting, topics are discussed along with strategies for solving problems. Family members are also given educational materials they can review at home and share with other family and friends. Discussion topics include living with personality changes and other difficulties, how brain injury affects family members' lives, and understanding emotional and physical recovery. Topics also include coping with loss and change, understanding and managing intense emotions, and important things families can do to extend the natural recovery process.

To help understand how the program is helping, VCU researchers

ask each family member a series of questions at the end of each meeting.

Families are asked to say whether the session was helpful, whether they felt they met the goals for the session, and the most important thing they learned. VCU researchers have looked at the responses to these questions, and their findings will be published in an upcoming issue of the international journal, *NeuroRehabilitation*.

Overall, the researchers found that most family members and survivors rated the program as very helpful. Meetings that covered stress management and strategies for optimal recovery were among the highest rated. Family members' goal attainment ratings were also very high with 80% or more rating the goals for each meeting as having been met. Finally, when families were asked at the end of the program whether or not they would recommend the Brain Injury Family Intervention to others, the overwhelming response was, "Yes."

The Brain Injury Family Intervention is an on-going project. If your family is interested in participating or if you would like to learn more about the project, please contact Dr. Emilie Godwin at (804) 828-3701 or toll free at (866) 296-6904. You can also email eegodwin@vcu.edu.

Fun & Caution on the Internet with Social Networking

Have you noticed? The whole pattern of communication has changed in this country! How many can remember that we used to call people on the phone any time we wanted to talk. Then there was email--it was the next new thing! Now we have social networking sites like Facebook, My Space, NING, LinkedIn, and Second Life. Some of you may stay on Facebook or another one of these sites for long periods of time each day. Some may not have heard of any of the sites. Just in case, let's talk about each one. After we discuss what these sites can be used for, we are going to talk about some cautions. Yes, there are some dangers involved.

Facebook: One of the most popular social networking sites, Facebook allows friends and acquaintances to keep in touch with people they know, care about, or are related to. Used by people of all ages, it allows users to post pictures and have control over what someone can read or see about them. Friends can make comments on the "wall" of each person's Facebook "page." It is free and you can put facts about yourself and pictures on your page.

MySpace: MySpace is also for friends and communication but now tends to be used by a younger crowd. Music is one of the main shared features among users.

NING: NING is a more private site for all ages. But, they are beginning to charge users, so rumor has it that they may not be with us much longer.

LinkedIn: LinkedIn allows professional and business people to advertise their qualifications, abilities, and interests to friends, associates, and sometimes even potential employers.

Second Life: This is more of a game where users create a character, known as an avatar, to interact with other users almost like a 3D chat room. It's home to a lot of user-created content, virtual real estate, and more.

Posting and getting in touch with others on these sites is like writing letters. There are important manners and cautions to remember. Always remember to use COPS (Caution On Pushing "Send"). If you push the send button too quickly, and have said something that might hurt or anger another person, it is too late to take back. Read and reread what you have written before you send it, and ask yourself if you would like to receive that message. Would you like your mother or grandmother to read it?

Here are some other things to know for your own protection: Be careful what you post, identity theft is possible when your personal information is out there for the world to see. Have someone help you set up your page to make sure you keep some information secure. If someone on a social networking site asks for your password, address, or other personal information, NEVER give it to them!

If someone seems annoyed or not interested in your communication, stop trying to reach them. Sometimes the federal internet police are called and users who meant well have been charged with such things as stalking.

Have fun and enjoy yourself, but be polite and always use COPS.

Mark Your Calendar!



- ◆ **Event:** T.G.I.F.
- ◆ **Location:** Belmont Recreation Center, 1600 Hilliard Road in the Lakeside area of Henrico Co. every 1st Friday of each month
- ◆ **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.
- ◆ **Event:** Richmond Chapter and Support Group
- ◆ **Location:** 3rd Monday every month at 6 pm, in the Children's Hospital Auditorium at 2924 Brook Rd.
- ◆ **Contact:** Call the Richmond BIAV at (804) 355-5748 for more info!

May 22-June 5, 2010

- ◆ **Event:** Camp Bruce McCoy
- ◆ **Location:** Triple-R Ranch, Chesapeake, VA
- ◆ **Contact:** Call 804-355-5748 or visit www.biaav.net for more information

June 3-4, 2010

- ◆ **Event:** Williamsburg Professionals' Conference: Rehabilitation of the Adult and Child with Brain Injury: Practical Solutions to Real World Problems
- ◆ **Location:** Williamsburg Hospitality House
- ◆ **Contact:** Call Brain Injury Services at 703-451-8881 or visit www.tbiconferences.org
- ◆ See the ad on page 7 for more information!

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 contact Matthew Wetsel at 804-828-3703 or wetselme@vcu.edu

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: How do I deal with the changes in my life after a brain injury? Nobody seems to understand how hard it has been for me! I feel alone in this process.

A: It is common to feel lonely and believe that no one understands following a brain injury. Coping with the losses and changes can be challenging. Here are some ways you can help yourself:

- Allow yourself to ask for help.
- Realize that your feelings are a common, normal response to your experience.
- Take one step at a time, set goals for each day.
- Recognize the good things in your life and changes for the better.
- Focus on what you can do instead of what you can't.
- Be hopeful. Say positive things to yourself and others (e.g., "I will make it through this," "I've come so far.")
- Remain active, do things you enjoy.
- Distract yourself with music, a book, a movie, or television.
- Make a list of things that you are thankful for and qualities you like about yourself, refer to the list often.
- Join a support group. Talk to other survivors for support and ideas for coping.
- Appreciate the value of patience and persistence in reaching your goals.
- Apply coping strategies that have worked in the past.
- Learn about brain injury, resources, and recovery.



CHAT WITH PAT

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

DEAR PAT: I am 24 years old and got a brain injury from riding a motorcycle almost two years ago. It was a sunny summer day so I decided to go riding with friends. On my way to meet them, a car came out of nowhere and hit me. I don't remember what happened after that, except that I was really hurt and ended up in the hospital. My parents told me that they didn't think I would survive when they saw me lying there in the hospital bed. Apparently, I was in really bad shape. I had to go through some serious rehab after getting out of the hospital.

I was determined to get my life back together so I worked really hard in rehab and at home. I moved back home with my parents because I needed help with certain things. It's been great to have their support even though it's tough living with your parents after being on your own.

(contd on page 3)



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



(*Chat contd from page 3*)

There are many days I wish I could have my life back. And there are many days I just want to give up. So, since the accident, I haven't been able to go back to school or get a job. I can't drive yet.

No matter how many times my parents tell me that I'm doing well, it's hard for me to believe them. I don't feel like I have accomplished any of the things I want and I'm frustrated. I just feel like I'm running around in a circle and not getting anywhere. I have all kinds of ideas in my head of what I would like to do but it's been hard to put them into action.

Pat, I need help to figure out how to get my life back together. How do I reach my goals? How do I organize my life so I can feel like a useful person again?

Bob

PAT'S RESPONSE:

Dear Bob,

It is understandable to feel frustrated with the speed of progress you are making. It is common for persons with a brain injury to feel like they are not getting better fast enough. Practicing patience is hard when you want to return your life to normalcy.

Becoming independent again is obviously important to you. It is great that you have created goals and ideas for future plans. The challenge is evaluating the goals to determine if they are reasonable. Setting reasonable goals can be difficult after brain injury for several reasons. You might still be figuring out how the injury has affected your abilities. The resources might be more limited for persons with a brain injury. And, you likely feel pressured to achieve big goals more quickly than is practical. Here are some tips to consider when setting reasonable goals:

Pat's Advice: Setting Reasonable Goals

- * When setting goals, look at recent progress instead of making comparisons.
- * Take small steps. If you have a large goal you want to accomplish, break it down into little pieces that you can accomplish. Working one step at a time, you'll come closer to reaching your larger goal.
- * Move ahead one small step at a time from where you are right now. For example, if you are thinking about going back to school, start with one class then add more if you do well. Taking one small step at a time will provide more chances for success. Success will make you feel more confident to handle the next step forward.
- * Remember that most people expect too much and set their goals too high. Scale your goals back from what you initially plan.
- * Ask trusted family, friends, and professionals for input about whether or not your goals are reasonable.
- * Remember that some goals are too big for one person to handle on their own. They may take the help of lots of people. Realize your limitations and ask for help reaching goals when you need it.
- * Congratulate yourself and give yourself credit for small successes.
- * Remember that setting reasonable goals increases the chances of getting what you want.

To help organize your daily life, it is a good idea to create a "to-do" list and prioritize each major thing from 1 - 10. A "1" would indicate the highest priority and a "10" would be the lowest. Work on the highest priority first. Check off your accomplishments daily. Doing so will help you monitor progress and develop reasonable expectations. Tasks not completed should be moved to the next day's list. Review the list every day or more often to help stay on track.

No matter how much you accomplish, you will probably want to do more. You will feel better if you recognize your good intentions and the limitations of being human. Learn to trust your feelings. If you feel like you are doing too much, you probably are.

I wish you well in reaching your goals, Bob! I hope you have many successful stories to share.

Creating a Positive Family Environment

By Emilie Godwin

Worry often becomes a big part of the lives of many survivors of brain injury and their family members. Anxiety is a normal part of the recovery process. However, frequent worrying and recognizing only barriers or failures can keep you and your family from developing happiness with your new life post-injury.

In order to notice all of the ways you and your family are getting better, your family must first create a positive family environment. Typically, many families in recovery struggle to see the progress they are making. To see if your family is having a hard time thinking positively, take the Family Environment Quiz to the right. Count how many you mark true, and then continue reading on page 6!

Family Environment Quiz

1. We argue all of the time in our family.
True___ False___
2. At least one person in my family is always in the middle of some disaster or another.
True___ False___
3. I can't count on anyone in my family but me.
True___ False___
4. My family often makes my stress worse instead of better.
True___ False___

(contd on page 6)



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: jhmarwit@vcu.edu

or

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



HAVE YOU MET LINDSAY FARRAR, B.S.?

Lindsay F. Farrar, B.S., has been working in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation since 2008. Farrar began her involvement in the department working on a Commonwealth Neurotrauma Initiative (CNI) grant, researching the effectiveness of a community-based intervention in brain injury clubhouses across Virginia. In August 2009, Farrar transitioned to the Neuropsychology Division of the department, where she is presently involved primarily in conducting neuropsychological evaluations. She also works on the TBI Model Systems project, as well as on a research study concerning drugs which may improve the rate of recovery and function after brain injury.

Residing in Buckingham, VA for 18 years, Farrar moved to Lynchburg, VA for four years while pursuing an undergraduate degree. She graduated cum laude from Lynchburg College in May 2008 with a Bachelor's of Science degree in Psychology, and a minor in Interdisciplinary Studies/Teacher Education. While at Lynchburg College, she was an active member of Psi Chi: The National Honor Society in Psychology and the Lynchburg College Emergency Medical Services team. Farrar moved to Richmond in 2008 and is currently pursuing her Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling at Virginia Commonwealth University, with plans to graduate in December 2010. She is also currently interning at VCU's Center for Psychological Services and Development as a student therapist.



In her spare time, Farrar enjoys spending time with her husband and their dog Bo, hiking, camping, and participating in other outdoor activities.

(Family Environment contd from page 5)

The more items you marked true, the more likely your family is having a hard time maintaining a positive attitude. Instead of feeling down about your true responses, first – remember that worry and focusing on the negative can be a very normal part of recovering from TBI for both survivors and family members. Next, take a look at the tips listed below. These ideas will help your family begin to change your environment from a focus on the negative to one that is hopeful and positive. Pick one strategy that you have not tried before and use it regularly for one month. At the end of the month, take the above quiz again and see if you have made some progress in developing a positive family environment.

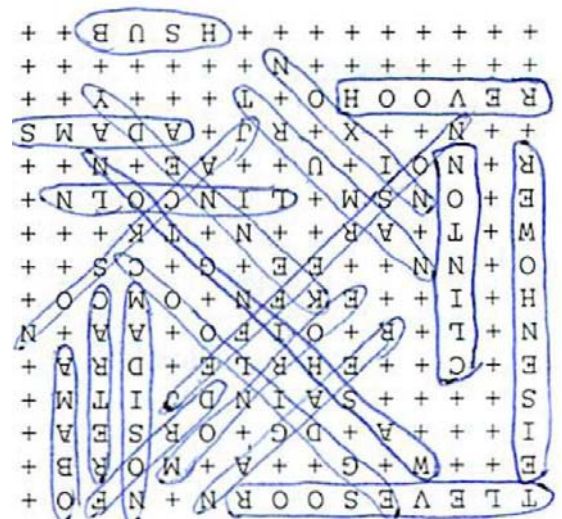
Creating a Positive Family Environment

- ❑ Schedule a family meeting and ask all family members for one idea about how the family can try to create a more supportive and positive home life. Write the ideas down and vote as a family on the two that will most likely work for your family. Work together as a team to make the changes. In two weeks, see how you’ve done. Reward yourselves with something that will be fun for the whole family.
- ❑ Create a family sheet of personal and family gains and accomplishments and make a rule that every person must write at least one accomplishment on the list every day. To show how everyone is working together, give each person their own color to write with and display the list in a room your family uses often.
- ❑ If your family conversations seem to always be centered around the negative things in your lives, come up with a system for helping one another by noticing and pointing out negative talk. When you are helping someone else in the family to change the focus, ask, “Can you think of any ways this might be a good thing?” Even if the answers seem silly, say them. A good laugh can change the mood of the conversation and create an opportunity for positive thinking!



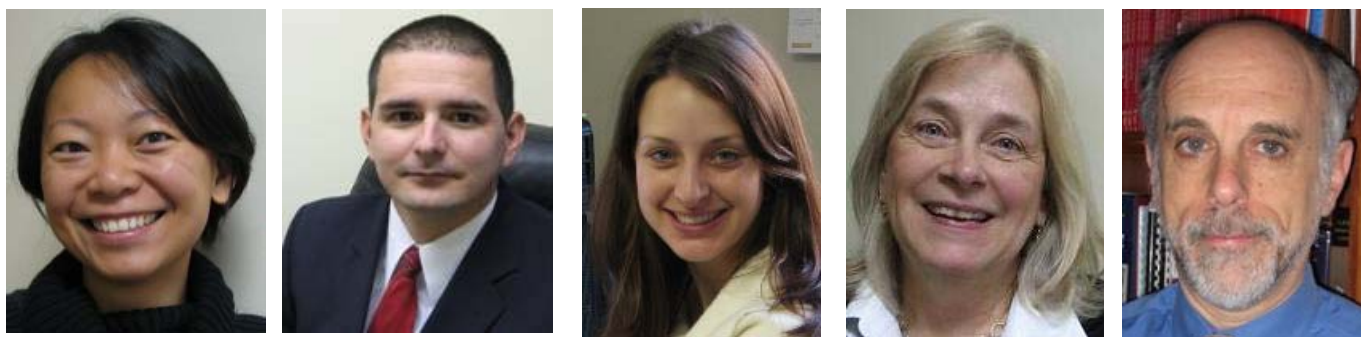
JUST FOR FUN! SOLUTION

KENNEDY (7, 7, SE) (Over, Down, Direction)
 LINCOLN (8, 10, E) ADAMS (11, 12, E)
 MADISON (12, 7, N) BUSH (13, 15, W)
 MONROE (11, 2, SW) CARTER (13, 7, N)
 NIXON (4, 10, SE) CLINTON (3, 5, S)
 OBAMA (14, 1, S) COOLIDGE (12, 8, NW)
 REAGAN (5, 6, NE) EISENHOWER (1, 2, S)
 ROOSEVELT (9, 1, W) FORD (13, 1, SW)
 TRUMAN (9, 13, NW) HOOVER (6, 13, W)
 WASHINGTON (4, 2, SE) JACKSON (9, 12, NE)
 JEFFERSON (11, 4, SW)



Mark Your Calendar! The 2010 Williamsburg Conference “Rehabilitation of the Adult & Child with Brain Injury”

Please join us for the 34th annual conference, Rehabilitation of the Adult and Child with Brain Injury, to be held in Williamsburg, Virginia June 3-4, 2010 and a special one day pre-conference on June 2, 2010. Every year since 1977, rehabilitation professionals from around the world have come together to learn about brain injury with the goal of discovering effective, new ways to resolve common challenges and achieve optimal outcomes. Keynote presentations will focus on neuroimaging, a survivor's perspective on recovery, and mild brain injury. Other presentations will focus on cognitive technology and cognitive rehabilitation, fatigue, and serving veterans. Among the list of speakers this year, we're proud to have some of VCU's very own presenting on a variety of topics, including behavior, spirituality, sexuality, pediatric neuropsychology, relationships, and family intervention.



*VCU presenters involved in clinical and clinical research. Do you recognize any of them?
From left to right: Nancy Hsu, Psy.D., Juan Carlos Arango-Lasprilla, Ph.D., Taryn M. Stejskal, Ph.D.,
Janet P. Niemeier, Ph.D., Jeff Kreutzer, Ph.D.*

Conference faculty includes talented individuals with substantial clinical and clinical research experience. Plenary and breakout presentations will highlight empirically based, practical solutions to major challenges. Learning opportunities will include didactics, demonstrations, and case problem solving. For participants desiring an in-depth, hands-on training experience relating to cognitive rehabilitation or family interventions, the three-day conference will also feature two pre-conference, day-long workshops.

The response from the 2009 conference was very positive. With the integration and focus on presentations to additionally cater to caregivers, whether family or professional, the conference offers more practical information for rehabilitation than ever before. Participant feedback included comments emphasizing how much they enjoyed the knowledgeable speakers and the wealth of useful, pragmatic information they found to help their patients.

Visit the web site www.tbiconferences.org to find the latest information on conference schedules, faculty, and downloadable forms for registration and exhibit/sponsorship. You will also find information about the 2009 conference, including presenters' handouts.

We hope to see you in June!

JUST FOR FUN!

See if you can find the names of 20 US Presidents scattered in the Word Find! Names can be written forwards, backwards, diagonally, and from top to bottom. See if you can find them all!

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| __ADAMS | __KENNEDY |
| __BUSH | __LINCOLN |
| __CARTER | __MADISON |
| __CLINTON | __MONROE |
| __COOLIDGE | __NIXON |
| __EISENHOWER | __OBAMA |
| __FORD | __REAGAN |
| __HOOVER | __ROOSEVELT |
| __JACKSON | __TRUMAN |
| __JEFFERSON | __WASHINGTON |

Answers on page 6 in case you get stumped!

T L E V E S O O R N G N F O Y
E X O W Z G V L A U M O R B A
I R A T A E D G J O R S E A Z
S B X J C S A I N D J I T M L
E B C S Y E H R L E V D R A N
N U L P R H O I F O B A A S N
H N I W N E K F N U O M C O E
O L N N M B E E C G S C S X L
W B T P A R Z H N P T K A C F
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R X N O I C U C Q A E R N B I
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S L V Y C L W N B H O P B Y V
J F K Y S F R T U H S U B U M

VCU, PM&R

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY MODEL SYSTEM

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