How to Support a Brain Injury Survivor

New Mexico

Brain injury (BI) survivors need a lot more rest than they used to

- Individuals with brain injury can get physically fatigued as well as “brain fatigued.” This makes it very difficult and tiring to think, process, and organize.
- Cognition, or thinking, is a fragile function for a brain injury survivor. Some days are better than others.
- Offering to help or suggesting other options for getting something done may help a survivor who is trying to accomplish a task.
- Let the individual to work at their own pace. This allows new pathways to form in their brain.

Brain injury rehabilitation takes years

- Rehabilitation continues long after a hospital stay has ended. A brain injury survivor may seem very different compared to who they were before the injury.
- Have patience with the survivor’s memory and processing speed. They may not remember things as well or as easily as they used to.
- When listening to an individual, try not to interrupt. Allow them to find their words and follow their thoughts. This will help them rebuild their language skills.
- Repeating instructions and tasks in the same way each time is a rehabilitation strategy.
- Allow the survivor time to register what they are doing so that they can be more successful at completing tasks.

Be aware of the circumstances if a behavioral challenge arises

- Behavior challenges are often an indication of the brain injury survivor’s inability to cope with specific situations, and are often not mental health issues.
- Social situations can be difficult for a survivor. Crowds, confusion, and loud sounds can quickly overload an injured brain, which may not filter sounds as well as it used to. Limiting exposure to social situations may be a coping strategy.

Remember that the brain injury survivor is starting over

- Help them by writing information down.
- Be mindful of the lighting and noise in the environment when meeting with a survivor.
- Reminder phone calls about appointments are very important, especially on the day of the appointment.
- Help and encourage their efforts.
- Be patient, and allow the individual time to process information. They need to be able to use many coping mechanisms, accommodations and strategies to navigate their new life.