

hostility, and anxiety of any parent of a seriously ill child (see [Chapter 17](#)). In addition, these parents face the uncertain outcome of the cerebral dysfunction. The fear of death, cognitive impairment, or permanent physical disability is present. Nursing intervention with parents depends on the nature of the pathologic condition, the parents' personality, and the parent–child relationship before the injury or illness.

Probably the most difficult situations are those that involve children who never regain consciousness. Unlike losing a child through death, these situations lack finality, which often leaves the parents in a state of suspended grief. An awareness of these behaviors and coping mechanisms provides nurses with the understanding that helps them support the parents in their grief process.

Superimposed on the process of grieving for the “lost” child, parents may be faced with difficult decisions. When the child's brain is so severely damaged that vital functions must be maintained by artificial means, the parents must make the final decision of whether to remove life-support systems. Nurses continue to provide specialty care during this time that maintains the patient's physiological status while addressing informational and psychological needs of the family. This decision is difficult for parents, but having an open and honest dialog about the child's medical condition and prognosis can help make patient-centered conclusions ([de Vos, Box, Plötz, et al, 2015](#)). Parents' cultural, religious, and language needs along with their intellectual level, decision-making preferences, and emotional state are considered during the discussions ([Allen, 2014](#)). Sometimes parents may choose to refuse or not initiate treatment if they believe it to be best for the child and the family (informed dissent). At other times, parents request that “everything possible” be done for the child.

When the child has survived the cerebral insult but physical or mental capacity is limited (either minimally or severely), families must cope with and make decisions about the rehabilitation process and uncertain outcome. The family may need to make decisions whether to place their child in a chronic care facility or to care for their child at home. The drain on financial, emotional, and social resources can be enormous. For parents who choose to care for their child at home, planning begins early in the recovery process. The