

Family Dynamics and Caring Responsibilities

Brain Injury Support in Northern Ireland

This leaflet is part of the series:
'Brain Injury Support in Northern Ireland'

Family Reaction to a Brain Injury

Brain injury affects whole families, not just individuals. Many difficult stages may need to be dealt with, from the initial shock of the news of an injury, to eventual acceptance that things may now be very different from how they used to be - for both the individual concerned and the whole family.

Becoming a Carer

A brain injury changes the life of the person with the injury, and the lives of their family and their friends. You may now have a caring role and becoming a carer can have a significant impact on your lifestyle and relationships. However, many changes can be positive. For example, many families become closer as a result of helping each other through the difficult times.

It is common for family members and those who are close to the person with the brain injury to have problems adjusting to the new situation.

Everyone will have a different response and there is no right or wrong way to feel in these circumstances. It is advisable to seek as much help and support as possible and you may find it helpful to talk things through with someone outside the situation, such as a counsellor or family support worker.

There are many organisations and services within the statutory and voluntary sector which can be of great assistance to you. Your GP should be able to provide you with information on local services which can provide support, information and signposting.

You should carefully consider the extent to which you can provide care and should not feel that you have to do everything yourself.

It is advisable to talk to Social Services and involve others, such as professionals, friends and family. Sharing the responsibility may be better for you and your relative in the long term.

The Stages of the Family's Emotions

- Shock, panic, denial; "Please let him live."
- Relief, elation, denial; "He's going to be fine."
- Hope; "He's still making progress, but it's slow."
- Realisation; "He's not going to get back to his old self." Anger, depression, mourning.
- Acceptance, recognition; "Our lives are now very different."

Living with a Brain Injury

- **Children** often experience emotional problems as, alongside coping with the initial trauma and the subsequent difficult behaviour of a parent or a sibling with a brain injury, their own needs are often neglected and this can impair their performance at school.
- **Families** may need education, guidance and support to cope. Some families cope better than others, but all have challenges - there is no "normal" way of responding to the effects of brain injury.

People in families and relationships seem to cope best when:-

- They have the ability to be flexible, not being rigidly tied to how things ought to be but being able to embrace change and view it as a challenge.
- They have the ability to communicate openly and honestly, directly expressing emotions both positive and negative and recognising the needs of themselves and others within the family.

Carers Needs Assessment

The Carers Needs Assessment focuses solely on the carer, not the person they care for.

Carers are encouraged to take up the opportunity to have an assessment as it gives them the chance to talk about:-

- The support they provide
- What they may find difficult at the moment
- Any concerns they have for the future
- How caring affects their physical and emotional health
- What support they may need to continue caring

Carers have found that having an assessment can be useful. It can help them to take stock and think more clearly about their situation.

It can also help carers to access more practical help and support. This help could be from Social Services but may also come from other organisations.

After an assessment, carers can expect to receive a copy of the document including the actions that have been agreed and the timescales against these actions.

They will also be given a review date and direction on how to make contact with services if their circumstances should change.