



the brain injury
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Caring for someone with a brain injury

7. Relationships

Adjusting to family role changes

Brain injury can radically alter the dynamics of families and relationships, especially if the person with the brain injury was previously the main wage earner and can no longer work. Roles and responsibilities within the family can change and this can be very hard to get used to at first.

These changes can cause problems and there can often be a lot of resentment and tension. However, there can often be a lot of positive changes and a strengthening of relationships. For example, your relative might now get the chance to spend more time with their children and the bond between them could strengthen as a result.

It is important to try to be aware of the reactions of different family members and to keep everyone included in order to prevent feelings of isolation. If any family members seem to be having particular trouble adjusting then try to let them know that their feelings are normal and natural.

It is important to work with your relative's therapists on family and relationship issues. The therapists should consider the family as a whole as part of the rehabilitation process.

Changes to sexual relationships

Sexual difficulties can be embarrassing to talk about, but are particularly important to deal with. It helps for both partners to talk things through with a qualified counsellor, preferably one with knowledge and experience of brain injury. A clinical neuropsychologist who specialises in sexual relationships would be ideal, but specialist relationship and sex counselling is also available from the organisation Relate (see 'Useful organisations').

Headway runs a training course called Sex and sexuality after brain injury which provides a useful introduction to the subject. Further details of the course and how to book a place can found on the 'Professionals' section of the Headway website.

Friends

Your relative's friends can be just as affected by the injury and its consequences as the family, but won't have the same support and may struggle to manage their feelings. It is easy for friends to drift away and lose

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touch, often not because they want to, but because they don't know how to deal with the situation or don't want to get in the way.

Try to keep in touch with both your relative's friends and your own. Keep them involved by giving them certain jobs to do, which could also take some of the pressure off you. Friends will often be more than happy to take over some caring duties for a while, which can prevent your relative from becoming socially isolated and give you a break.

It is also a good idea to pass on any literature which you have found helpful, such as this or other Headway booklets.

This factsheet is adapted from the Headway booklet 'Caring for someone with a brain injury', which includes more information and case-studies.

To discuss any issues raised in this factsheet, or to find details of our local Groups and Branches, please contact the Headway helpline free of charge on 0808 800 2244, or by email at helpline@headway.org.uk. You can also find more information and contact details of Groups and Branches on our website at www.headway.org.uk.

Headway produces a range of booklets and factsheets covering brain injury related issues. Booklets can be ordered from www.headway.org.uk/shop.aspx or by telephone on 0115 924 0800. Factsheets are freely downloadable from the website.

Brain injury survivors and carers can receive free copies of appropriate booklets from the helpline.

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