

The Child Brain Injury Trust is a national charity supporting anyone affected by childhood acquired brain injury. The following information has been developed to help the reader understand more about brain injury and some of the associated issues. Every effort has been taken to ensure the information is accurate and up to date. If you require more immediate support or assistance please contact our **Helpline 0303 3032248** or email helpline@cbituk.org where we will be able to respond to your specific enquiry and offer support.

Looking After Yourself

Being very busy

When you have a child who has had an acquired brain injury (ABI) you will probably devote all your time to looking after them, as well as the rest of your family who have to cope with the anxiety and trauma.

You spend time making sure that everything is in place, that your children's needs are met, that the family tries gets back to as normal a life as possible and everything is done to make sure that your injured child has the best possible education and rehabilitation. For some, things may have changed to the extent where they may have had to give up work totally or partially; they may have a new and different role.

But parents often find it difficult to look after themselves.

Do we all react in the same way?

Each person in the family may feel and react differently to what has happened and this is ok. If people in the family react differently to you, it is not that you or they are wrong; people have different ways of responding to and coping with events. The intensity of how anyone reacts to their child or sibling's brain injury may also differ.

You and your family may feel shocked at what has occurred, anxious about "getting it all right" and dealing with everything. You may also feel sorrow and perhaps despair, and worry about the future. You may feel angry or blame yourself or others for having let this happen, whether there is any real justification in this or not.

Why should I put time into myself?



In all this you may consider that your feelings and needs are not important compared to everyone else's. **But it is important that you take care of yourself.** It is not selfish. Taking care of yourself will help you to take the best care of your child and family.

When our lives change suddenly we can feel worn down and it may be harder to do the things we need to do. At these times, we may be more vulnerable to feeling depressed. Feeling depressed can lead to us not eating or sleeping well, which can in turn prolong feeling down. Properly nourishing ourselves, body and soul, can help reduce the impact of these feelings.

Of course these feelings are natural at first in the circumstances and most people have them but often they gradually diminish or change. If they continue for a long time they can become part of your life, at times almost unnoticed.

Looking after yourself will help you to:

- Have the energy and clear-sightedness to judge what is best to do and manage the situation for your injured child and your family.
- Be responsive to your whole family and continue to maintain and strengthen the relationships with them which will be good for everyone.

What can I do?

This is all more easily said than done and you may wonder what you can do. Here are a few suggestions. Some may be right for you, but not all. They are just ideas which others have found helpful.

- **Keeping yourself fit and well** by sleeping and eating properly, and exercising regularly - this may mean going for a short walk each day, running or going to the gym.
- **Allowing yourself time each day** to do exactly what you want to do. This may be sitting down with a cup of coffee/tea, reading the newspaper, a book, watching TV, listening to music, going for a walk - whatever you enjoy. As hard as this may feel right now **tell the family this is your time** not theirs, that you want to be quiet without them making demands - "This is my time". Perhaps you need to go to your bedroom. It may only be for 15 minutes or so but it should be uninterrupted. Despite what you think, the family will eventually understand that this is your quiet time.
- **Go out** either alone or with your partner or a friend and leave someone else to care at home. Accept offers of help with this. This may be once a month or every other month. It does not have to be for very long or need not cost anything - a walk, visit to the cafe or pub, whatever you like to do.
- **Talk to the family** about how you are feeling, and listen to them talk about their feelings and allow them to react differently.
- **Talk to your friends** about how you are feeling - someone who will understand and listen and not feel upset about how you feel.
- Sometimes, you may need to do more. **Talking to your GP** and making sure you can have time to do so, can be helpful, and s/he may be able to put you in touch with **health professionals who are trained to listen**.
- There are also many **helplines** with trained people at the end of the line, who can listen. These include the **Helpline of the Child Brain Injury Trust**, but there are more, for instance the Samaritans, Contact a family and others.

Please also look at our other Factsheets on ***Feeling Low, Sad and Depressed, Anxiety*** and ***Post Traumatic Stress***.

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