

# Feeling Anxious, Feeling Blue: What the Heck am I Going to Do?

TBI Forum

January 19, 2011

\* \* \* \* \*

Jo Ann Brockway, Ph.D.

Clinical Associate Professor

Attending Psychologist

Department of Rehabilitation Medicine  
University of Washington Medical School

Feeling



Feeling



What the Heck  
Am I Going to Do?



# What We'll Cover

- Stress and anxiety
- Depression
- What you can do to feel better
- Where to go for help if the problem persists

# The First Step

- Recognize and acknowledge the feelings you have
- There is nothing strange or shameful about feeling anxious or depressed after a life-changing event like brain injury



# What Is Stress?

- *Stress* is the way the body reacts to signals
- Brain and body go into “ALERT!!”
- Healthy stress is protective
- Happens when threat is interpreted as being real

# Stress

- Normal to feel stressed after brain injury
- Stress can build up and lead to anxiety

# What Is Anxiety?

- A feeling of nervousness or fear that is out of proportion to the situation
  - Can be general
  - Can be related to a specific stimulus or situation



# Symptoms of Anxiety

- Heart racing or pounding
- Feeling as if you can't think
- Stomach distress
- Feel hot
- Feel tension/tightness in muscles

# How Does Brain Injury Contribute to Anxiety?

- Difficulty concentrating, thinking, reasoning can make it hard to do things, so person feels stressed
- Stimulus overload (noise, lights, activity, crowds) can make one feel stressed
- Too many demands, time pressure can result in stress

# What Makes Anxiety Worse

- Trying to do too much
- Expecting perfection
- Pattern of avoiding things that make you anxious
- Some medications



# What Is Depression?

- More than feeling sad
- Persisting low mood and negative outlook

# Symptoms of Depression

- Depressed mood
- Difficulty enjoying anything
- Negative thoughts
- Low energy
- Feel bad about yourself
- Hard to concentrate

# Why Does Brain Injury Contribute to Depression?

- Changes in brain chemistry
- Not being able to do the things you used to do
- Loss of your life as you knew it

# What Makes Depression Worse?

- Stress
- Isolating yourself
- Staying in bed all day
- Some medications
- Not taking medications as prescribed



How Can I Deal with All of  
This?

# Coping is not...



What Can You Do to  
Feel Better?

# What You Can Do

- The basics
  - Eat healthy food
  - Avoid or limit alcohol
  - Reduce or stop smoking
  - Get out of bed and stay out of bed during the day
  - Get some exercise

# What You Can Do

- Manage Stress
  - Take breaks
  - Relaxation breathing
  - Meditation
  - Listen to a tape with guided imagery
  - Listen to relaxing music



# What You Can Do

- Get moving
  - Go for a walk
  - Play with your dog
  - Find a volunteer activity
  - Go fly a kite
  - Take yoga

QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.

# What You Can Do

- Do something you enjoy
  - See a movie
  - Watch something funny on Youtube
  - Engage in a hobby

QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.



# What You Can Do

- Connect with other people
  - Family
  - Friends
  - Support group
  - Peer mentor

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

# What You Can Do

- Share your feelings  
--the good and the not-  
so-good--with a  
good friend

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

# What You Can Do

- Have a schedule
- Set a goal for the day or for the week
  - Make it reasonable
  - Make it specific
  - Cut yourself some slack if it doesn't go perfectly
  - Revise if necessary
  - Try again

# What You Can Do

- Decrease your negative thoughts
  - Become aware of negative thoughts by monitoring them...write them down
  - Challenge your negative thoughts
  - Try to find a more positive way to look at the situation

QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.

# What You Can Do

- Increase your positive thoughts
  - Notice positives in your life
  - Write down 3 positive things you did, thought or felt each day
  - Review them often



# What You Can Do

- Look for triggers for anxiety or depression
  - Notice when you feel anxious or depressed
  - Write down the situation
  - Look for patterns

# What You Can Do

- Plan ahead for triggering situations
  - Plan how you will cope
  - Get rest beforehand
  - Use relaxation strategies
  - Focus on positive or neutral thoughts

# When You Need Additional Help

- Talk to your doctor
- Consider counseling
  - Psychologist
  - Family therapist
  - Social worker
  - Mental health therapist
- Consider medications



# Counseling Therapies

- Systematic Desensitization
- Exposure Therapy
- Problem-Solving Therapy
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

# Systematic Desensitization

- Anxiety is incompatible with relaxation
- Teaches relaxation skills
- Develop hierarchy of increasingly anxiety evoking scenes
- Visualize the scenes, starting with easiest, until feel anxious, then relax
- Repeat each scene until comfortable

# Exposure Therapy

- Re-experience the anxiety evoking event by writing or talking about it in the therapy situation
- Often gradual
- May involve “re-writing” the event

# Problem-Solving Therapy

- Learn to identify and assess problem
- Generate several solutions without judgment
- Pros/Cons of each possible solution
- Pick the best and try it out
- Evaluate results

# Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

- Based on idea that thoughts and perceptions trigger emotions
- Teaches recognizing and monitoring thoughts
- Challenging thoughts
- Generating more adaptive positive thoughts/perceptions

# Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

- Learning to be aware of thoughts, images, emotions, and memories as just thoughts, images, emotions, and memories
- Letting them to come and go without fighting them
- Being aware of and open to the present
- Discovering what is most important to one's true self
- Setting goals according to values and carrying them out responsibly

# Final Notes

- Recognize your failings
- Recognize your strengths
- Change doesn't happen right away
- It isn't always easy
- Sometimes you'll mess up. We ALL do
- If at first you don't succeed.....TRY, TRY again

# Resources

- King County Crisis Clinic  
206-461-3222  
Toll Free: 1-866-427-4747
- Snohomish County crisis line:  
425-258-4357
- Pierce County crisis line:  
253-396-5180



# Resources

- Hopeline (National Crisis Line):  
1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:  
1-800-273-TALK (8255)

