

# RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION

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# OUTLINE



COMMON RELATIONSHIP CHANGES AFTER TBI



THEMES IMPORTANT FOR RESILIENCY



EXERCISES FOR BUILDING RESILIENCY



COMMUNICATION TIPS

# TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

- TBI causes physical, cognitive and emotional changes.
- These changes impact relationships.



# TYPICAL EXPERIENCES AFTER TBI

## SURVIVOR

- “I’m treated like a child”
- Frustrated that I have to depend on my partner
- Worried that I am a burden
- Feel bad that I no longer can do the things I used to
- Feel bad that I get angry

## PARTNER

- I feel like my partner is a different person
- I am overwhelmed by my new responsibilities
- I don’t understand why my partner is angry/tired/irritable
- I don’t feel like I am doing enough

I hope that things will go back to “normal”  
I am afraid that changes are permanent  
I miss the way things used to be before the TBI  
I feel alone

# CHANGES IN RELATIONSHIPS AFTER TBI



CHANGES IN  
RESPONSIBILITIES



CHANGES IN RELATIONSHIP  
ROLES

## CHANGES IN ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Survivors often give up responsibilities

- Working, cooking, driving, planning, managing finances

Partners often take on new responsibilities and leadership

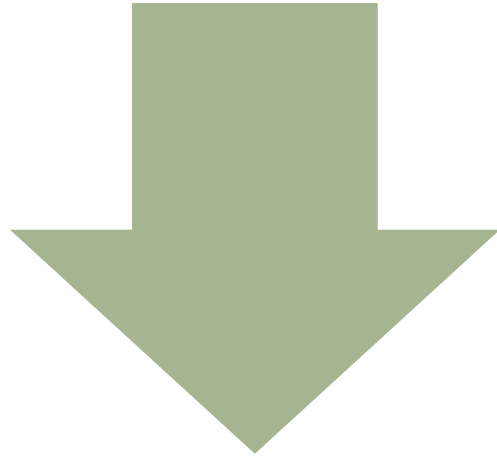
- Cooking, cleaning, planning, managing appointments, finances

Both parties take on new tasks

- Going to health care appointments

These changes are often drastic and sudden

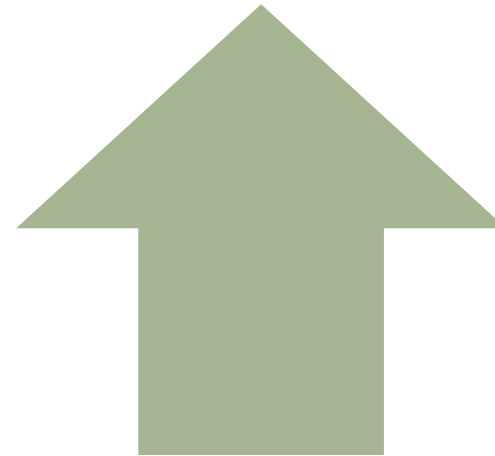
- Relationships are always changing but changes after a TBI are sudden



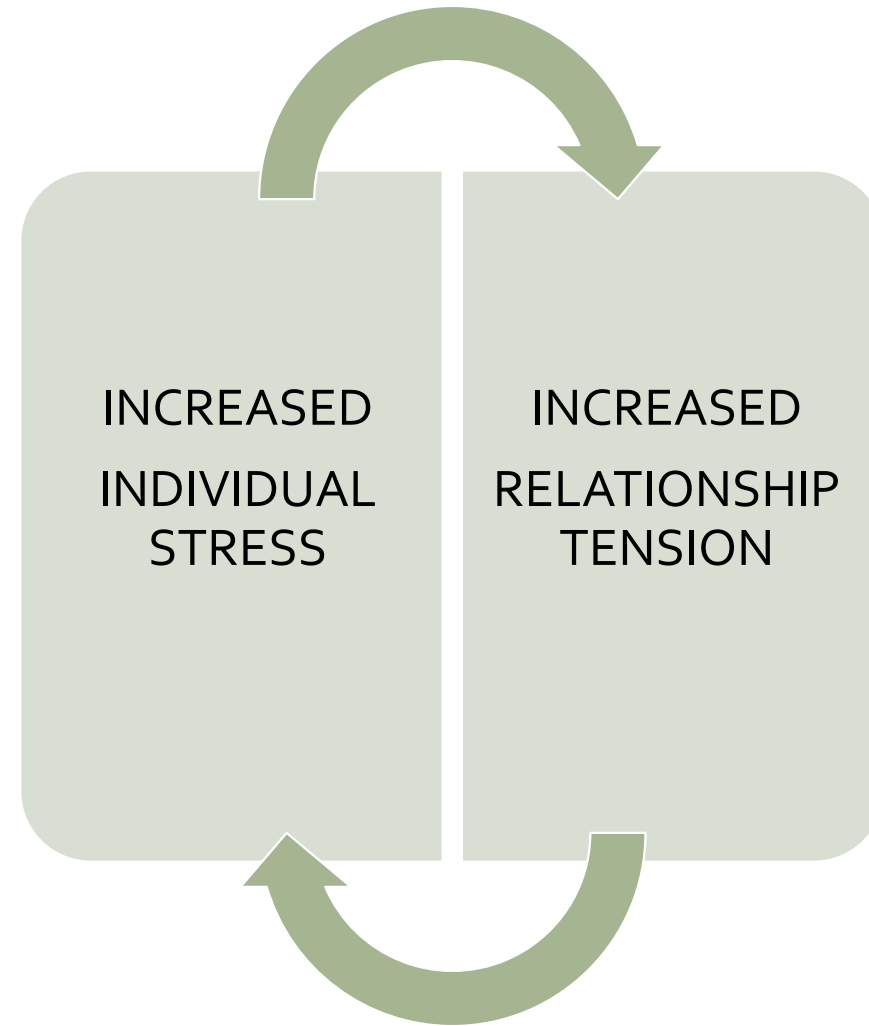
Partner has  
less time and  
more  
responsibilities



Survivor has  
more time and  
fewer  
responsibilities



# CHANGES IN RESPONSIBILI TIES





# COUPLES

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHFTvrsrKMU&feature=youtu.be>

# BUILDING RESILIENT RELATIONSHIPS



## GRIEF

Grieve aspects of pre-injury relationship to make room for the new relationship



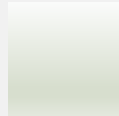
## FLEXIBILITY

Renegotiating roles and responsibilities



## SOCIAL SUPPORT

Involve family and friends, lean on others for help including a couples therapist



## KNOWLEDGE ABOUT TBI

Know about common consequences ahead of time



## COMMUNICATION

Concrete and direct language

## THE 'NEW' RELATIONSHIP

- “I stopped hoping that he would return to being the person he was before the brain injury. Instead, I hoped that I could find attributes to love in this new person. By opening up to seeing those facets of [my husband], and especially by letting him bring out new parts of me, I did fall in love with him again.”

# TIPS TO BUILD RESILIENCY

## COMPASSION

Talk about changes in responsibilities  
Talk about changes in relationship roles  
Talk about feelings  
Be understanding of each other

## PLEASURE

Emphasize positive changes  
Track good things that happen  
Schedule time together to do things you enjoy  
Think about a new future

## GRATITUDE

- Verbalize thank yous
- Discuss 3 things you are grateful for each day

# EXERCISES

## TALKING

Think of one way your responsibilities have changed since the TBI.

- Example: Since the TBI, I have been cooking all the family meals.

How do you feel about this change in roles or responsibility?

- Example: I often feel stressed when I have to cook after being at work all day. Sometimes it frustrates me but sometimes I feel proud of the meals I make.

What works best for you when you have to cope with that changing role?

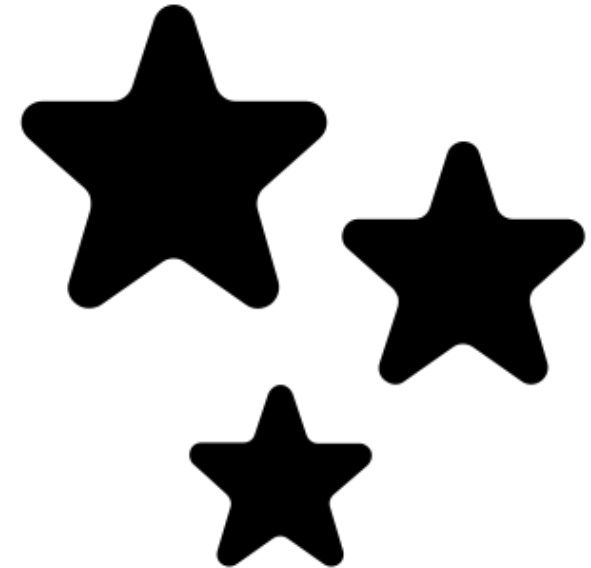
- Example: I like it when you help me prepare the meal such as setting the table or chopping vegetables. This makes me feel like we are working together.

# EXERCISES

## TRACKING THE GOOD

- TELL YOUR PARTNER 3 GOOD THINGS ABOUT YOUR DAY

- These things can be simple like a sunset, a good meal, or a smile from a stranger
- Be specific
- Ask your partner what good things happened in their day.



# EXERCISES

# GRATITUDE

3 Things I Noticed Today That I Appreciated About My Partner

3 Ways My Partner Contributed To My Life Today

3 Things My Partner Said or Did Today That Represent Their Best Strengths and Qualities

Her laugh

She drove me to an important appointment

She laughed at my joke even though it wasn't funny

# EXERCISE

# COMPASSION MEDITATION

- **A Loving-Kindness Practice for Beginners**
- *Gently close the eyes if you feel comfortable doing that, or direct the eyes towards the floor.*
- *Begin with a few deep breaths. Check in with where you're starting this moment; physically, emotionally, mentally.*
- *Consider a person in your life who you care about. This could be a good friend, a partner, perhaps an animal. Imagine them sitting in front of you and looking into your eyes.*
- *Get a sense of your heart in this moment, and with intention say to this person, "May you be happy. May you be healthy in body and mind. May you be safe and protected from inner and outer harm. May you be free from fear, the fear that keeps you stuck."*
- *Again breathing in and breathing out, reconnecting with your heart.*
- *Now incline your heart and mind towards yourself and saying to yourself, "May I be happy. May I be healthy in body and mind. May I be safe and protected from inner and outer harm. May I be free from fear, the fear that keeps me stuck."*
- *Now imagine the other people in this room and notice their presence around you*
- *Connecting with your heart once again, and just like you did before saying now to them: "May you be happy. May you be healthy in body and mind. May you be safe and protected from inner and outer harm. May you be free from fear, the fear that keeps you stuck."*
- *And breathing in and breathing out, as we end this practice gently do another [mindful](#) check-in. Get a sense of how you're feeling now, without any judgements. What emotions are present? Is this mind busy or calm?*
- *Perhaps ending by thanking yourself, and all the people who you included in this practice,*
- *And when you're ready, gently open your eyes.*



# EXERCISE

# CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Identify the  
problem, not  
the person

Avoid accusatory language or personalizing the issue  
• *The problem is not calling when I am going to be late*

Reflective  
Listening

Restate what your partner said in your own words  
*I hear that you're hurt because I didn't call*

"I"  
Statements

Use I statements to avoid accusations  
*I feel hurt when you don't tell me you'll be late vs. "You never call when you'll be late"*

Time-outs

When argument becomes aggressive or insulting

Work

Work toward a resolution  
*I will try to call or text when I am running late.  
I can try to express my hurt without yelling.*

# EXERCISES

## SCHEDULE A PLEASURABLE ACTIVITY

1. Tend the garden.
2. Listen to music.
3. Read a book.
4. Go for a walk in a natural setting, such as the woods or a park.
5. Watch a movie.
6. Help someone/ volunteer.
7. Watch sports.
8. Exercise together.
9. Play a board game.
10. Watch children play.
11. Play cards.
12. Ride a bicycle.
13. Go for a run.
14. Visit a friend.
15. Play with a pet
16. Sing a song.
17. Play a musical instrument.
18. Pray
19. Go on a hike
20. Watch the sun rise or set.
21. Cook a meal together

# EXERCISE

## RELATIONSHIP VALUES and VALUE BASED ACTIONS

1) Put a circle around all the words that represent what you value in a relationship.

CONNECTION

CONTRIBUTION

SEXUALITY

CARING

HAVING FUN

TEAMWORK

TRUST

RESPECT

FAIRNESS

ACCEPTANCE

SENSUALITY

HONESTY

SUPPORT

ENCOURAGEMENT

ASSERTIVENESS

# COMMUNICATION TIPS