

Loneliness after Brain Injury: When Connection Feels Different

Brain injury changes lives in ways that extend beyond what's visible. From memory and emotional regulation to concentration and physical mobility, there are many challenges. One of the most painful and least understood impacts is how the injury can hurt your connection with others. Difficulties in communication and social interaction can leave you feeling isolated and can erect an invisible wall, leaving you with an overwhelming experience of profound loneliness.

You Want More Out of Life

The desire to make your life better is rooted in two basic human needs that guide behavior: **the need to feel connected to those around you** and **the need to contribute to your community**. In other words, the need to receive and show love, and the need to be constructive instead of feeling inadequate.

As you recover from brain injury, you begin to want more out of life. You may feel constrained by your inability to follow conversations, to remember things, and to do physical activities that were once effortless. You may be reluctant or unable to leave the house, so you withdraw into your own world of TV, reading, eating, and doctor's appointments. Your basic need to feel connected goes unmet.

Be More Accepting of Yourself

As a person with a brain injury, you may hesitate to explore new activities and meet new people because you have trouble getting around, following conversations, or finding the right words. You may worry about what others think of you. The likelihood is that many people are more understanding than you think, and that you are more critical of yourself than others are of you. Keep in mind that people will connect to your character, kindness, and interests, regardless of how well you speak or remember names and faces. Like you, they too have a need to connect and feel appreciated.

Rebuild Connection

Rebuilding connection after brain injury takes time, patience, and compassion both from others and from yourself. Many people find comfort in **joining brain injury support groups**, whether in person or online, where they can share experiences with others who truly understand what this kind of

loneliness feels like. **Therapy or peer mentoring** can also be powerful tools, offering space to rebuild social confidence, explore identity changes, and learn new ways of relating to others. **Honest communication with loved ones** is another important step – letting them know what feels different now, what helps, and what doesn't. You can explain that connection might look quieter or slower than before. Finally, you can **find meaning or belonging in communities**, hobbies, or volunteer roles. Relationships may look different after brain injury, but they can still be deeply fulfilling in new ways.

Acknowledge Invisible Challenges

Loneliness after a brain injury is often complicated by invisible symptoms that others simply don't understand. You may struggle daily with challenges like slowed thinking, persistent fatigue, and sudden emotional swings, which can lead to feeling misunderstood by friends and family. However, rebuilding connection and contribution can be achieved through celebrating small wins and embracing small, manageable actions. Meaningful connection can be found in simple tasks, such as helping a neighbor with their mail, committing to calling one friend a week, or volunteering for just 30 minutes at a time. Even the daily responsibility of caring for a pet can provide a sense of purpose and companionship.

Preview Social Situations

If you find yourself hesitant to seek new opportunities to meet people, you can use a method called previewing. Maybe you are invited to a party at a neighbor's house and you're worried about feeling overwhelmed by the noise and conversations. Before the party, you can sit quietly and imagine the faces of the people attending. Select a few people you want to speak with and what you want to discuss with them. Imagine having each conversation. When you go to the party, you should have those conversations, then decide if you want to stay or leave. Previewing helps you imagine how to make a socially overwhelming situation more enjoyable because you prepare for it ahead of time.

At the Brain Injury Association of Virginia, our trained experts are available to speak with you about your experience, answer your questions, and connect you with the best providers/resources for your needs. Our services are free and confidential.

To get in touch:
Call 1-800-444-6443
Visit biav.net

This article is provided for informational and educational purposes only. The information is not intended as a substitute for professional advice, diagnosis or treatment, and you should not use the information in place of the advice of your medical, psychological, or legal providers.

This project is supported through state general funds (Contract #16-002A) administered by the Virginia Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS).

Content last reviewed: 12/19/2025