

Understanding Grief after a Brain Injury

Grief is what we feel when we lose something or someone important to us. It is a natural and very strong mix of feelings. You might feel shocked, sad, angry, or even "numb," like you can't feel anything at all.

After a brain injury, grief is very common. This happens because your life and who you are might feel different now. It is normal to miss:

- The person you were before the injury
- Being able to do things on your own
- Feeling like you are in control of your day

You might also worry about your friendships, your future plans, or money. These worries can make you feel a deep sadness. You might spend a lot of time thinking about "how things used to be" and forget about the strengths you still have.

Grief isn't just sadness. It can feel like a rollercoaster of different emotions. One day you might feel lonely or guilty; the next, you might feel scared about the future.

If you feel overwhelmed or like you can't handle it that is okay. It doesn't mean you are weak. It just shows that you are dealing with a very big change in your life.

The Survivor's View

For the person with the brain injury, the journey can be very hard. In the hospital, there are doctors and nurses helping you every day. You have a "map" to follow to get better.

The hardest part often starts when you go home. When the extra help stops, the reality of the injury starts to sink in. This is when the real work begins—saying goodbye to the past and learning how to live as your "new self."

The Family's View

Many people think grief happens in five steps:

1. **Denial** (thinking "this isn't happening")
2. **Anger** (feeling irritated or furious)
3. **Bargaining** (thinking "if only I had done this...")
4. **Depression** (feeling very sad)
5. **Acceptance** (learning to live with the change)

But with a brain injury, these steps are not always in order, and can be experienced numerous times. For families, the grief often feels strongest when their loved one comes home. It can be painful to realize that their family member has changed permanently. They have to learn how to care for and get to know this "new version" of the person they knew. It is also not uncommon for a survivor or family member to become "stuck" at one of these steps, and that is ok.

Finding Support and Staying Strong

Grief is a heavy weight to carry, but you don't have to carry it alone. Trying to do it all by yourself can make you feel even lonelier.

Here are ways to find support:

- **Ask for Help:** Talk to family, friends, or community groups
- **Take a Break:** Caregivers need time to rest so they don't get too tired (this is called "respite care")
- **Keep Moving:** Exercise, meditation, or going to a place of worship can help lower stress
- **Try New Things:** Families can find joy by trying art, music, or volunteering
- **Keep Traditions:** You can still do the things your family loves, even if you have to change *how* you do them

By working together and finding creative ways to handle the loss, families can stay strong and build a good life together. If you need help with finding any of these supports, please contact BIAV.

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**

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