TBI Loneliness: Break Free From Loneliness After A Brain Injury

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Over the years, you wake up each morning with the certainty that your life would remain relatively stable. Then one day, you have a bad car accident. When you wake up after the accident, you are surrounded by nurses, tubes, beeping monitors, and the shock that something serious occurred but you can't remember what. You find it hard to speak, remember, move. You are staring down a future of doctors, rehabilitation, and uncertainty.

But time and resilience march on. After being diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury, you receive wonderful support and treatment and get a little better each month. You are encouraged by your progress but still think about the job you can no longer do and the friends who stopped calling. You feel guilty about how your family has been effected, and powerless to care for them as before.

You Want More Out Of Life

With each small success, you begin to want more out of life but feel constrained by your inability to follow conversations, remember, and do physical activities that once were so easy. You feel lonely but reluctant to journey out of the house. So you withdraw into your own world of TV, reading, eating, and doctor's appointments. Greater isolation and loneliness set in.

As humans, we try hard to avoid isolation and loneliness by creating expansive lives through school, friendships, sports, arts, religion, and family. After a brain injury, your world shrinks and you can quickly withdraw into isolation and loneliness, which are shackles that constrain recovery.

You Can Break Free From Loneliness

You can break free from loneliness and expand your world again. Having a life of meaning and achievement can help you feel worthwhile and productive after a brain injury. You can have a renewed sense of mastery and control over your life, which are important to recovery.

The first step is to work with a friend or family member to answer the *Breaking Free From Loneliness* questions below to determine how you want to expand your world. I discuss these questions with my patients and the discussion helps them determine how to escape from loneliness. So, find someone you trust and discuss these questions for yourself.

Make Everything a Routine: Whatever you choose to do outside the home to rebuild your life, make sure the activities are scheduled routines each week. For instance, every Monday you are at the gym exercising from 11:00am to 1:00pm; Tuesday you are taking a painting class from 4:00pm to 5:00pm, and so on. By making your activities set routines each week, you are more likely to follow through and be consistent.

Breaking Free From Loneliness Discussion Questions

Step 1: Before your brain injury, what did you enjoy doing in the following areas:

Family activities:

Hobbies:

Socializing with friends:

Spiritually:

Volunteering:

Work:

Exercise:

Sports and recreation:

Arts:

Step 2: What other activities or interests do you have now that you did not have before your brain injury?

Step 3: Based on the lists above, select the top three activities that you want to consistently do with others outside the home at this time.

Step 4: How can you get involved with those activities outside the home each week on a regular, consistent basis?

Step 5: List the steps you need to take to get started (such as calling, emailing, or signup).