Possible Formats for Meetings

BIAC Support Group format is at the discretion of the facilitator. The meeting format can vary according to the wishes and needs of the groups' members. This can be discussed at meetings, or the attendees can complete a questionnaire requesting input. Some possibilities are:

- Sharing sessions – if desired, attendees can be divided into groups consisting of family members, people with brain injury or siblings, as each of these have their own unique problems and sharing is an important part of their support. Sharing sessions may include articles of interest relating to brain injury.

- Facilitator scheduled speakers - Poll participants to find out what topics are of greatest importance/interest to them.

- Invite experts for interactive experiences – Support Group participants may enjoy group activities such as yoga, meditation, music therapy.

- Socials - An occasional social can be a welcome break and the possibilities are endless. Winter holiday parties, beach gatherings, picnics, movies and covered dish suppers are a few suggestions. Facilitators can contact other facilitators or BIAC for ideas.

- **Please remind participants that this is a BIAC Affiliated Group and how BIAC can help.**

Running the Meeting

The following is an outline of how a meeting might be conducted with time allotted for each phase of the meeting. This is just one example and can easily be changed to suit the specific needs of your group.

A Sample Meeting Format

Opening and Introductions
(5-15 minutes)

Unless everyone knows each other, a brief introductory period is helpful. This is the time newcomers are introduced and can speak briefly about themselves to the group. A long talk where each member tells "his or her story" should be avoided. It can lead to a long discussion of injuries and medical histories rather than focusing on the present.

Old and New Business
(10 minutes)

A small amount of time can be spent on housekeeping items, such as upcoming holiday events, a letter from a former member, an update on the new meeting space, etc. This is brief information-sharing time, reserved for the leader to make important announcements to the group. An alternative would be a facilitated, limited time slot for information sharing among members. Subjects that require group discussion, such as rotation of jobs/offices, should be reserved for a separate time.

Support Group Session
(50-60 minutes)

Most of the time the support group spends together should be reserved for facilitated supportive exchange. If the group includes a significant number of individuals with brain injury and a number of family members, it is an option for the groups to divide for separate meetings. The facilitator formally closes the meeting each time, perhaps summarizing the group's discussion.

Social Time
(15-30 minutes)

Most groups disband slowly as people chat with one another before leaving. The group may want to offer a short reception period after the meeting for people who want to talk informally and for new people who want to get to know others. A designated volunteer should stay until the end to ensure that everyone leaves safely and that any clean up and security issues are handled.

Group Discussion Ideas

The support group topics should be decided by group consensus. The following list of topics is intended for a discussion led by the facilitator or an expert on the topic.

Possible Discussion Topics for Persons with Brain Injuries

- Making new friends
- Dealing with anger
- Learning to handle not always being in control
- Maintaining independence
- Asking for and accepting help
- Challenges related to brain injury that I have faced and overcome
- Challenges related to brain injury that I have had difficulty handling
- Injury acceptance

- How brain injury affects travel and vacation
- Helpful strategies
- Dealing with an "invisible disability"
- Learning to communicate with my doctor about my brain injury
- Deciding whether to disclose a brain injury at work
- Asking for reasonable accommodations at work
- Dealing with fatigue
- Handling the reactions of family and friends
- Maintaining relationships with caregivers when receiving physical care
- How brain injury can affect the role of parent
- How brain injury can affect family communication
- Communicating feelings and needs
- Helping family and friends to better understand my brain injury
- Ways a care manager can help

Note: Adapted from: Helping the helper: Program ideas for your self-help group. American Self-Help Clearinghouse; Possible discussion questions. New Jersey Self-Help Group Clearinghouse; Self-help group resource manual. National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Mid-Jersey Chapter; Weinstock, H. & Johnson, D. (1988).

Possible Discussion Topics for Caregivers

- Understanding changes in behavior
- Time management
- Feelings of social isolation
- Staying organized
- How brain injury affects
- How to fight fair relationships and marriage
- Wrestling with guilt
- No one understands!
- Overprotective tendencies
- Talking to children about brain injury
- How and when to let go
- Covid
- Sleep problems brain injury
- Dealing with anxiety
- Accepting the way things are
- Signs of depression
- Stress management
- Loneliness
- Anxiety and sleep problems
- Planning for the future
- Energy boosting strategies
- Estate planning

Ice Breakers

Icebreakers can help a group discussion get started quickly and enthusiastically. Here are a few suggestions:

Icebreaker 1 (for new groups)

The leader passes a roll of toilet paper to the person closest to him or her and says, "Take as much as you think you need and pass the TP to the next person". The leader does not offer any more information.

Once the TP has gone around the room, the leader says to the group, "For every square that you tore off, tell the group something about yourself'. This will make people laugh and the one with only one square will usually feel relieved!

Icebreaker 2 (focused conversation icebreaker for a new group)

Leader: "Please state your name and the number one reason you came here today." The leader goes around the room, getting a response from each person. Afterward, he or she chooses from the list of the following questions, allowing members to answer, as they will.

1. What do you remember from these responses?
2. What words or phrases stood out for you?
3. Were there any surprises?
4. What did you hear that intrigued you or made you want to find out more?
5. What words or images would you use to characterize this group?
6. What connects us and draws us together as a group?
7. What strengths do we have that will assist us in our task?
8. How can we use them to be as effective as possible?

This conversation takes the group from basic information about themselves through impressions and some interpretation about why they gather together.

Icebreaker 3

The leader reads a quotation that may be suited to the group such as, "Life is the art of drawing without an eraser," by John W. Gardner. The leader then goes around the room and lets each person say what that quote means to them. Notice how many points of view come from the same quote and see how we learn from each other.

Icebreaker 4

The group forms a circle. One person starts and looks to the person on his or her right and states one thing they have in common with that person. The person then names one characteristic that makes him or her unique (e.g., "I collect frog statues." "I like to draw."). At the end, the leader acknowledges that everyone has things in common as well as unique qualities to bring to the group.

Icebreaker 5

The leader brings in a paper cup. He/she holds it up and asks, "What is this?" The group answers, "It is a cup."

The leader asks, "What is it used for?" The group responds, 'To hold liquid or drinks."

The leader asks everyone if they agree and then uses the cup to scoop something (candy or chips) and says, "Now it's a scoop." Then the leader pulls out a cup with a plant in it and says, "Now it's a planter." The leader ends by saying that people just generalize that cups are for drinking, but they are for many things.

The leader can then follow up the demonstration with these questions:

- What generalizations has the group encountered? Ask about generalizations relating to their injury experience.
- What generalizations have people made about you?
- How does that make you feel?
- How can you help people better understand brain injury?

Note: Icebreakers adapted from Jenkins, J. (2001). The dynamics of an icebreaker {online].

Icebreaker 6

Some groups have an outline for people to follow when they first speak. If the group is in a circle, members speak in a round robin (speak in turn of seating order).

Here is a sample outline:

- State your first name and tell us what brought you to the group.
- On a scale of 1-10 rate your week.
- Tell us about one good thing that happened over the past week (sets optimistic tone).
- How you are feeling right now?
- Tell us one positive thing you would like to do over the next week.

Note: Reprinted from: Koch, K., (2008). Facilitating self-help groups: A manual for self-help group leaders. National Multiple Sclerosis Society.

Theme & Topic Suggestions

The following are suggested topics that vary from month to month, based on what might be going on with group members at various times of the year. We all know that sometimes you cannot control the topic or theme because attendees come with their own issues and agenda, which is ideally, what we want. However, if you are struggling to strike up a topic or no one brings one up at the group the following are just part of your tool kit to pull out

when needed. ***Many of the theme suggestions could be used in any month, so use them whenever it works for your group***.

Theme Suggestions

- **January**
    - Since December can be a hectic month for many, consider holding a holiday party in January. Particularly if your group is held later in the month, you might find it difficult to get attendees in December, and people will be in a better state of mind to celebrate after the stress of the holidays.
    - Group Topic: What one thing do you want to accomplish this year? What are some steps you could take to accomplish this? The goals can be for persons with a brain injury and caregivers, and could focus on goals that are related to hobbies/recreational activities, vocational, educational, family, physical issues, personal issues, social issues, etc. *See Appendix 1 (The Value of Setting Goals) activity sheet*.
- **February**
    - Next month – March – is Brain Injury Awareness Month. Discuss how you as a group or as individuals within the group, can raise awareness about brain injury. Below are a few suggestions:
        - Share Your Story: Every day in March, BIAC shares a personal story of brain injury on their Facebook page. Visit their website at www.biact.org or Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/BrainInjuryAllianceCT/, or Instagram at https://www.instagram.com/braininjuryalliancect/?hl=en and learn more about how to share your story.
        - Spread the word: Share information about brain injury and Brain Injury Awareness Month on your social media accounts, and in your community. BIAC provides materials for individuals to share in their community.
        - Educate your legislator about brain injury: You do not have to wait until there is pending legislation to educate your legislators and you do not have to have an agenda. Just let them know you want to tell your story and share the challenges you face as either a person with brain injury or loved one. Not sure who your legislator is or what to say when you visit? Go to the BIAC website to learn more - http://www.biact.org/legislative-advocacy.
        - Host a community event or fundraiser: Individuals and businesses from across the state host diverse events with a common goal – to increase brain injury awareness. Events like Blue Jeans for BIAC at your office, pajama day at your child's school (students pay $1 to

wear pajamas) or Purple Thursdays are just a few examples. The type of event you host is only limited to your imagination.
        - Contact your local media: Write a letter to the editor informing them about Brain Injury Awareness Month. Share your personal connection with the cause and encourage them to help you spread the word.
    - Group Topic: How are your friends and families doing with brain injury awareness? Do you feel that they understand your injury and how it affects you day to day? Is there something you can share with them or tell them that would help them understand better? *See Appendix 2 (Lost & Found: What Brain Injury Survivors Want You To Know)*. Discuss having a "guest night" when attendees invite a guest to come to the support group, someone special in their life who does not fully understand their injury.
- **March:**
    - Check in with group members to see what they are doing for Brain Injury Awareness Month and offer suggestions from last month's meetings as a reminder.
    - Spring is about renewal and adjusting to life with brain injury can be similar to renewal. Coming to grips with the person you were before, and who you have become. Life will not be as it was before, but that does not mean it cannot be positive and worthwhile.
    - Group Topic: Some have compared the adjustment to brain injury to the stages of grief, in the sense that the individual and family/friends grieve who they were before the injury. For those of you in the group who have gotten to the stage of acceptance, what advice can you offer to those who might still be on the path to acceptance. What does acceptance mean to you? *See Appendix 3 (From There to Here) and Appendix 4 (My TBI Journey: From Denial to Acceptance)*.
- **April:**
    - As the weather gets warmer, people get outdoors more and might become more involved/interested in social/recreational outlets. It can be a good time to ask people if they are going out and what they like to do outdoors as the weather gets nicer.
    - Group Topic: What type of social or recreational activities are people involved in, or what do they want to get involved in? Is there something they have never tried before that they would like to try or learn – a hobby, a craft, a recreational activity (examples, learning to swim, ski, paint, etc.)? *See Appendix 5 (Social & Recreational Opportunities)*.
- **May:**
    - Memory issues are common after brain injury and can impact everyone on a day-to-day basis. While some attendees may have gone through formal

rehabilitation, and learned strategies/accommodations for memory issues, others may not have. Sharing tips and suggestions among the group can be helpful for those who may not have strategies, and those newer to brain injury may have information about new strategies utilizing newer technology that those with older injuries might not be aware of.

  - Group Topic: What types of memory issues do you find to be the most challenging for you, and those around you, on a day-to-day basis? Do others have suggestions for strategies or accommodations that have worked for them to address those issues*? See Appendix 6 (Learning to Remember); Appendix 7 (Memory and Brain Injury); and Appendix 8 (Memory Compensations)*.

- **June:**
  - It can be challenging to stay motivated as the weather gets warmer. Some attendees may be more motivated than others, and some may have trouble getting started with things because of their injury. Those who are more involved in activities may be able to offer suggestions to others on how they stay motivated, avoid fatigue, manage fatigue, etc.
  - Group Topic: Sometimes brain injury can affect your ability to get started on something and your motivation. What are some strategies that group members use to get motivated and stay motivated? What motivates you? Are you doing things throughout the week that you love or that bring you joy? Are there things you want to do but have a hard time getting motivated? What could you do to help yourself get started? Could someone else help you get started, and keep you motivated? Are there strategies or even apps that can help with motivation? *See Appendix 9 (Initiation, Planning, Organization & Brain Injury); Appendix 10 (When Get Up and Go Is Gone)*.
- **July:**
  - Cognition and cognitive challenges are terms that are frequently discussed after brain injury and can be what impacts an individual the most on a day-to-day basis. Some attendees may have never heard it before or not know what it means, but they have challenges every day with it.
  - Group Topic: Have any of the professionals you have worked with since your injury mentioned cognition and cognitive challenges, or provided strategies and accommodations for you or your loved one for cognition? Has anyone in the group had cognitive rehabilitation, and how did it help them? Are there strategies you learned that you still use? *See Appendix 11 (Cognitive Problems after TBI)*.
- **August:**
  - Fatigue can be common after brain injury – both for the survivor and their loved ones. Depending on the severity of the injury and the supports within

the family – some caregivers might find themselves working full-time and coming home to caregiving. For the person with the injury, daily activities can be fatiguing – whether it is rehabilitation, volunteering, going to school, returning to work, or just running errands and attending medical appointments. Attendees may be able to share how fatigue affects them, what if feels like, what they do to avoid it, and what to do when it happens?

- Group Topic: Who feels more fatigued after brain injury – individuals with a brain injury and caregivers alike?
  - For the person with the injury – what do you do to avoid fatigue? For example, do you schedule activities in a particular way to avoid fatigue? What do you do when fatigue hits? How do you communicate to those around you that you are fatigued?
  - For the caregiver or family/friends – what do you do to avoid fatigue? For example, do you enlist family and friends, or paid providers, to help balance out the caregiving? Do you try to carve out time for yourself, or to do things you enjoy? *See Appendix 12 (Fatigue & TBI)*.

- **September:**
  - The summer is often a time that people take a break or vacation, and the fall is often a time that we start to get back to things. Back to school, back in the swing of things, back to our goals.
  - Group Topic: What types of things are people getting back to or do you want to get back to? Are there things you do not do anymore that you would like to get back to? Have you thought about going back to work or school, or volunteering? How are you doing with the goals you set in January – is it time to revisit them, or assess your progress? Are there new goals you want to set? *See Appendix 1 (The Value of Setting Goals Activity Sheet); Appendix 13 (Dept. of Rehabilitation Services Brochure 2017); Appendix 14 (JAN Accommodation & Compliance Series: Employees with Brain Injury); and Appendix 15 (Students with a Brain Injury: Achieving Goals for Higher Education)*.
- **October:**
  - After brain injury, there can be a lot of focus on rehabilitation and medical appointments. It is important to assess every now and then if you are still making time to do the things that make you happy.
  - Group Topic: What are the things in life that make you happy? It could be a hobby, spending time with family, traveling, taking time to relax. Are you spending enough time doing things that make you happy, and, if not, how can you make changes to include things that make you happy? **See** *Appendix 16 (Finding Happiness after Brain Injury) and Appendix 17 (Can You Find Happiness with a TBI?)*.

- **November:**
    - After brain injury, it can be more challenging to find things to be thankful for, but counting the things in your life that you are thankful for can be a positive thing. As we get closer to Thanksgiving and the holiday season, it can be a good time to reflect on the things we are grateful for.
    - Group Topic: After brain injury, how do you find things in your life, especially around the holiday season, to be thankful for? If you were to count your blessings today, what would they be? Perhaps you are the thing that someone else is thankful for – either your family, or the place you volunteer, or someone in the support group. *See Appendix 18 (When it is Hard to Feel Thankful)*.
    - Additional Group Topic that can bridge into December: How do you handle the stress of the holidays? Do you have trouble with large family gatherings, and, if so, do you have strategies you use? The holidays can also be lonely for some who have lost loved ones, or lost friends after their injury. How do you cope with loneliness during the holidays? *See Appendix 19 (Tips for Surviving and Enjoying the Holidays after TBI); Appendix 20 (TBI Loneliness); and Appendix 21 (The Loneliest Season (A Caregiver's Perspective)*.
- **December:**
    - The holiday season can be stressful, family gatherings can be overwhelming, and a lack of parties or family gatherings to go to around this time of year can result in depression for some. You may choose to have a holiday party instead of a support group to give everyone time to socialize and celebrate, or you may choose to have a regular group meeting as an opportunity to discuss how to deal with the holiday season after brain injury.
    - Group Topic: If you didn't touch on this in November, or want to revisit it - : How do you handle the stress of the holidays? Do you have trouble with large family gatherings, and, if so, do you have strategies you use? The holidays can also be lonely for some who have lost loved ones, or lost friends after their injury. How do you cope with loneliness during the holidays? *See Appendix 19 (Tips for Surviving - and Enjoying - the Holidays after TBI); Appendix 20 (TBI Loneliness: Break Free from Loneliness after TBI); and Appendix 21 (The Loneliest Season - a caregiver's perspective)*.
    - Additional Group Topic: What do you do so that the holidays are not stressful or emotionally challenging? Is there a way to simplify the holidays so they are more about a time of peace, and less about feeling hectic? *See Appendix 22 (Enjoying the Holidays after Brain Injury)*.