



the brain injury association

# A LIFE OF LOCKDOWN?



## How you can help A guide for friends and families

A brain injury can be a life-changing event, with many people feeling like a 'new' person since their injury. This can be extremely difficult for some brain injury survivors to process, but it can also be difficult for friends and family to adjust.

Reactions from friends and family can be mixed and may change over time. While some relationships may strengthen, others may gradually grow apart, for various reasons.

You may be aware that the relationship has changed, for example if you have started spending less time with the survivor due to their changed behaviour. Or it may simply be that you have fewer opportunities to meet, for instance if you were previously colleagues but they can no longer work.

There are any number of reasons why relationships after brain injury may be affected, but the overall consequence is often the same: a feeling of isolation felt by the brain injury survivor.

We have all, to a degree, experienced isolation through the Covid-19 pandemic. We know how difficult it can be to suddenly lose our ability to meet friends and family and be unable to travel to visit one another. For many of us, these restrictions will be over soon and a return to 'normality' will ensue. For many brain injury survivors, little will change.

**Let someone know they're not alone.**

**Reach out to help out.**

There are simple ways in which you can help to ensure that your friend or loved one does not experience a life of lockdown. Here we offer some tips on how to best support someone after brain injury.

### **Be flexible**

Be flexible when it comes to meeting up, as many survivors struggle to cope in busy, loud environments. Would a relaxed café be preferred to a busy coffee shop? Or a park compared to meeting indoors? Find out what environment they would be most comfortable in and be flexible to their needs.

Offer to meet the survivor at home or somewhere local to them if they are no longer able to travel, for instance if they can no longer drive or comfortably use public transport.

### **Meet local**

### **Find new ways of keeping in touch**

Find ways to keep in touch with the survivor that suit them, such as scheduling regular phone calls, texts, emails or writing letters. Even if your message is brief, it can still help someone to feel less lonely to know others are thinking of them.

Some days may be harder than others for the survivor, such as if it is an anniversary of their injury or if they are feeling particularly fatigued after a busy day. Do not take it personally if their behaviour is different on some days, and don't take it as a sign that you should completely leave them alone. Instead, check if they need any support and give them time.

### **Some days may be harder than others**

### **Arrange a rota**

Arrange a rota for family members or friends to keep in touch with the survivor so that they continue to have regular contact with others.

## **Be a listening ear**

Make a conscious effort to offer to be a listening ear and allow the survivor time to talk about how they are feeling. Experiencing a brain injury and living with the effects of it can be a very difficult experience for many people, but it can help to have someone close to talk to about it.

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Take time to learn about brain injury and ask the survivor what they personally experience. Educate other mutual acquaintances about this so that as many people around the survivor can be informed and supportive.

## **Learn about brain injury**

## **Be aware of depression**

Do not assume that just because the survivor appears to be coping or does not take the initiative to contact you, they do not need help. Issues such as depression and lack of motivation after brain injury can make it difficult for some survivors to reach out themselves.

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Find new activities to do together. These may be very different to things you did before your injury, but it can mark a new chapter in your relationship to begin a new activity or hobby together that accommodates for their needs. This can be something as simple as finding a new route to walk down together, or trying new recipes.

## **Find new activities**

## **Offer a lift**

Offer to give the survivor a lift to places if they are unable to travel themselves.

## Don't mind cancellations

If a survivor cancels a plan at the last minute, or does this on several occasions, be considerate and understand that there will be genuine reasons for this, such as anxiety, memory problems or problems with organising.

We hope that these tips help you to ensure that your loved one with a brain injury does not live a life of lockdown after brain injury.

For more general guidance on supporting a loved one with a brain injury, visit [www.headway.org.uk/relationships](http://www.headway.org.uk/relationships).

You can also contact our helpline on 0808 800 2244 or [helpline@headway.org.uk](mailto:helpline@headway.org.uk) to talk about any of the information in this factsheet or discuss anything else related to brain injury.

Find out more about our campaign *A life of lockdown?* at  
[www.headway.org.uk/isolation](http://www.headway.org.uk/isolation)