



ARTISTIC DEPICTION OF EMOTIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF BRAIN INJURY

Presented by Heather Brossman, B.A., CBIS,

Sally Kneipp, Ph.D., CRC, and

Kym Stine, B.S., M.S., LMT, NCBTMB

at the Nineteenth Annual Conference

of the Brain Injury Association of Pennsylvania

Sunday, June 23, 2019 (4:45 – 5:45 p.m.)



Session Objectives

At the conclusion of this session, the participants should be able to:

- Identify common emotional consequences of brain injury
- Describe one or more therapeutic approaches and strategies to cope with the emotional consequences of brain injury
- Understand how artistic creations can help individuals express their thoughts and feelings during the brain injury recovery process



Brief Overview of Emotional Consequences of Brain Injury

The reasons for emotional consequences, including diagnosed neuropsychiatric sequelae, may be attributed to:

- The direct effects of the brain injury itself (such as the location and severity of the injury) and/or
- The reactive effects (a “shattered sense of self,” loss of identity and hope for the future, loss of independence and spontaneity, loss of friendships and social connections...)



The Onset and Development of Emotional, Psychological, or Psychiatric Issues

- ▶ May occur immediately following the injury, may last for years (even when the traumatic brain injury is perceived to be mild), and may prevent access to, benefit from, or result in premature termination of, needed services
- ▶ May occur later in the rehabilitation process and result in diminished capacity to return to work, school or productive activity at home, reintegrate successfully in the community, and maintain harmonious relationships...



Common Emotional Consequences

- Depression
- Anhedonia
- Anxiety
- Frustration
- Irritability
- Anger
- Aggression
- Mood swings
- Egocentricity
- Impulsivity
- Rigidity
- Disinhibition
- Sexual Dysfunction
- PTSD



Alexithymia (Poor Emotional Self-Awareness)

At a conference presented by the Council on Brain Injury in Pittsburgh, PA, on April 9, 2019, Dawn Neumann, Ph.D. talked about **alexithymia**, poor emotional self-awareness. She described the contribution of alexithymia to poor emotional control (emotional dysregulation) and to depression, anxiety, aggression, and anger.

Reference suggested: The September-October 2017 issue of ***The Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation*** (Vol 32 • Number 5) on Treatments for Emotional Issues After TBI



Therapeutic Approaches and Strategies

Coping with Emotional Issues during Rehabilitation
and Recovery following Brain Injury



Acknowledge your Emotions

- ▶ It is understandable to feel overwhelmed, frustrated, anxious, or angry.
 - ▶ Accept that your emotions may be more difficult to manage and more intense post injury.
 - ▶ Give yourself permission to feel the way you do, but work on expressing your feelings appropriately.
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Be Willing to Ask for Emotional Support

- When it is a convenient time, talk with friends and family members about your feelings.
- Talk with your primary care doctor about the possibility of a referral for a psychiatric or psychological evaluation, and possibly mood stabilizing medication or psychotherapy with someone with expertise in brain injury rehabilitation.



Attend a Brain Injury Support Group

- ▶ You are not alone; other survivors may be experiencing the same challenges you are feeling.
- ▶ You may benefit from additional education and resources to enhance your recovery.
- ▶ Support groups offer the opportunity to network with survivors, family members, and professionals.
- ▶ A list of Pennsylvania support groups is available on the BIAPA website:
 - ▶ www.biapa.org



Consider Journaling

- Write in a journal to record your emotions and feelings.
 - Begin with a prompt: How am I feeling today?
 - Emotionally
 - Spiritually
 - Physically
 - Cognitively
 - Write in it at the beginning and then at the end of the day.
 - Record any approaches or strategies that worked well for you that day, and pleasurable moments.
 - Review your journal weekly or monthly to find triggers, patterns, and successes.
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Use a Daily Planner or Calendar to Help Reduce Stress

- ▶ Ensure that your schedule is realistic for you.
- ▶ Schedule breaks as/if needed throughout the day.
- ▶ Make sure to schedule enough time for sleep, exercise, hobbies, socialization, and meals.
 - ▶ Lack of sleep can increase fatigue and mood instability.
 - ▶ Exercise is known to reduce stress and to lessen the symptoms of depression and anxiety.
 - ▶ Participation in activities you enjoy (hobbies) will reduce stress and improve the quality of your life.
 - ▶ Proper nutrition will prevent fatigue and improve cognition.



Take “Brain Breaks”

- ▶ Short breaks, taken during an activity, will improve your ability overall to attend and concentrate on the task, and will minimize fatigue.
- ▶ Breaks may last from a few minutes to 30 minutes.
- ▶ A timer or alarm to cue you when to take breaks may be helpful.
- ▶ Breaks should be taken in a quiet place, when possible.
- ▶ Calming music or visual imagery may also be useful during a break.



Visual Imagery Script

Sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor. Close your eyes and take a deep breath in and then exhale out slowly. Imagine you are walking along a moonlit path in the forest. You can hear the sound of gurgling water from a nearby creek. You can smell the fresh forest air and feel a light breeze on your face. As you walk, you come to a clearing in the woods. You are now able to see the moon reflecting on the creek. Light sparkles and dances as the water rushes over the rocks in the creek. You sit down on the edge of the creek and, if you feel comfortable, put your toes in the water. The water is cool and refreshing. Take time to look at the water and listen to the sounds of the forest. This is your special place to relax when you need to. You can return here any time you wish. Take a moment to enjoy this place and take in all of the details. (Pause for 30 seconds.) Take a deep breath and open your eyes. Take a moment to notice how you feel.



Make Time for Meditation and Mindfulness

- Use meditation techniques to calm the mind and nervous system.
- Join a class or use a free application for cell phones.
 - *Breathe*
 - *Headspace*
 - *Insight Timer*
 - *Calm*
 - *Oak – Meditation & Breathing*
- Focus on the present; acknowledge and then let go of your thoughts.



Consider Animal Assisted Therapy

- ▶ Horses, dogs, cats, pigs, birds, and other animals may be used.
- ▶ Benefits include:
 - ▶ Improved mood
 - ▶ Decreased symptoms of anxiety or depression
 - ▶ Improved cognitive skills
 - ▶ Increased motivation



Express Yourself Artistically

- Draw, write, paint, compose, build something, take photographs, sing, or dance.
 - Music Therapy
 - Movement/Dance Therapy
 - Art Therapy
 - Horticulture Therapy
 - Use art to express your emotions and share with others.
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ART IMAGES BY KYM STINE