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- ◆ Define the problem
- ◆ Come up with possible solutions
- ◆ Weigh advantages and disadvantages of each possible solution
- ◆ Pick a solution to try
- ◆ Evaluate the success of the solution
- ◆ Try another solution if the first one is not working

**DEALING WITH CONFLICT:**

Most everybody argues and has disagreements once in awhile Remember, it's not what you argue about, but how you argue that can

harm your relationship. Here are some tips for handling arguments and "fighting fairly".

- ◆ Be specific about your issue and deal with it when it happens
- ◆ Don't blame the other person
- ◆ Take a minute to ask why they did what they did

- ◆ Be quick to forgive and apologize
- ◆ Be polite and respectful
- ◆ No name calling or cursing

*Dr. Jan Niemeier*

Look for Part II of *Nurturing the Relationships You Need after BI* in the next issue of *TBI Today*.

*The problem-solving format below can help when you're making a plan of action with your partner.*

PROBLEM	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES

## WE CHANGED OUR MINDS: SUCCESSFULLY SURVIVING A BRAIN INJURY

### *The 12 Elements of a Successful Recovery: The Caregiver's Perspective*

For the past few months, we have been soliciting information from brain injury survivors and their caregivers for our book: *We Changed Our Minds: Successfully Surviving a Brain Injury*. Many of you have made valuable contributions to the project, which would not be possible without your support. We are very grateful. As promised, in exchange for your help, we are providing the following report, the first of three, on what we have learned thus far.

#### **What is a Successful Recovery from Brain Injury?**

We believe that we are surviving Jessica's TBI successfully. Despite her significant physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral impairments, Jessica has slowly developed a full, satisfying, and productive new life. She has developed a wide circle of warm and caring, bright and energetic friends, who through their joint activities challenge Jessica to continue her recovery every day.

Since every brain injury is different, we realize that writing a book from the narrow perspective of our own experience would be foolhardy. Consequently, we are seeking input from other survivors and caregivers. Over the past few months, we have asked the following questions:

- ❖ How do you define a "successful" re-

covery from a brain injury?

- ❖ Are you recovering "successfully?"
- ❖ What is really hard about living with a brain injury?
- ❖ What advice do you have for survivors and their families who are just beginning their recovery?

Your comments show that there is much debate over the words "successfully" and "recovering." For those who equate "recovery" with "back to normal," you agree that success eludes all but a very few lucky survivors. Also, you confirm our belief that recovering from a brain injury is a lifelong process.

Many of you commented on the difficulty in defining "success." Here's what you said:

- ❖ The caregiver and the survivor must define their own success.
- ❖ What one may think successful, someone else might not.
- ❖ There are degrees of success. It depends on your current level of functionality.
- ❖ Success is fluid; it constantly changes.

Your numerous and perceptive contributions, combined with our eight years of experience living with a brain injury and our

extensive reading suggest that successfully surviving a brain injury from the perspective of the caregiver has twelve elements. (Since the majority of survivors are male, we have chosen to view the caregiver in this report as a woman.)

#### **A Caregiver Is Successfully Surviving a Brain Injury When She...**

1. Is doing her absolute best to care for her survivor.
2. Is confident that her survivor is doing his absolute best to live within his limitations and to recover to the greatest extent possible.
3. Does not bear too great a portion of the care giving burden.
4. Is supported by family and friends who fully understand her need for help and are willing to help.
5. Has a family that has adjusted well to the special needs of the survivor.
6. Is financially secure.
7. Utilizes all available medical resources.
8. Has an understanding with her survivor as to when he should complete a task by himself and when he needs help.

9. Has achieved a balance between seeking improvement and making do.
10. Has interests—professional, avocational, social, recreational—of her own.
11. Is comforted and inspired by her faith.
12. Accepts without bitterness that life is not fair.

Meeting all twelve of these elements is fantastical for most, if not all, of us. But we do think there is a practical purpose to compiling this list. Having a clear understanding of your objective—even if it is only partially achievable—can result in positive actions that will improve your life.

### **If You Would like to Read More**

As we conduct our research, we are writing two series of articles that we believe will be of interest to survivors and caregivers.

The first series—*Successfully Surviving a Brain Injury*—will cover many aspects of recovering viewed through the eyes of both a survivor and a caregiver. The first article in this series, *An Appeal to Survivors and Caregivers*, now appears in a number of newsletters including *TBI Today*, the newsletter of the National Resource Center for Traumatic Brain Injury. The second article in the series, *You Must Change Your Mind*, is now available.

The second series of articles—*A Slice*

*in the Life of a Brain Injury Survivor and Her Curious Caregiver*—provide our separate perspectives on everyday activities, such as driving, that are complicated by the sequelae of a brain injury. The first article in this series, *Drinking and Driving*, will be in the Spring/Summer 2006 issue of *BRAINSTORM*, the newsletter of the Brain Injury Association of Maine.

In preparing to write our book, we are reading many of the published personal accounts of survivors and caregivers, as well as guides for families coping with a brain injury. We have learned that the quality and usefulness of these books varies considerably. Consequently, we are writing a series of reviews of those we find particularly valuable. We will post these reviews on our Website.

### **What Do You Think of the 12 Elements Listed Previously?**

In our quest to understand better the factors that contribute to a successful recovery, we continue to ask for your help. There is a wealth of information on recovering successfully from a brain injury that we still have to learn.

At this time, we are soliciting your input and support in three areas:

1. How would you revise *The Elements of a Successful Recovery from the Perspective of the Caregiver* listed on

pages 2 & 3?

2. We are beginning to identify *The Elements of a Successful Recovery from the Perspective of the Survivor*. What do you think should be included in this list?
3. You can support our project in a number of ways:
  - ❖ Complete a questionnaire at our web site [www.BrainInjurySuccess.org](http://www.BrainInjurySuccess.org).
  - ❖ Use our questionnaires with your support groups.
  - ❖ Send us a letter or e-mail with your insights and comments.
  - ❖ Consider using some of our material on your web site or in your newsletter to help us spread the word and reach more survivors and caregivers.
  - ❖ Share this report with other survivors and caregivers, as well as professionals who work in the field of brain injury.

**Note:** Any profits derived from the sale of this book will be donated to Brain Injury Associations. Thanks very much for your support and interest in our project.

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# Research Volunteers Needed

## VCU Acquired Brain Injury Outpatient Rehabilitation Services Program

VCU Researchers are seeking adults with acquired brain injuries (such as stroke, aneurysm, traumatic brain injury, anoxic brain injury) and their families to be part of a research study. We are evaluating the helpfulness of an outpatient rehabilitation program. During the course of 5 sessions, participants will be given information on brain injury, local resources, skills development, and positive coping strategies. Qualified volunteers will also be asked to complete several questionnaires. All participants must be at least 18 years old.

Rehabilitation services will be provided at no charge at the Medical College of Virginia Campus. Volunteers will be reimbursed for their time and effort in completing questionnaires.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAM, PLEASE CALL:

**JENNY MARWITZ**

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