



Healthy Living: Coping with a traumatic brain injury

Monday Posted

Sep 12, 2016 at 7:47 PM

By Heather Turner For The Bulletin

Imagine yourself at a cookout. You feel over-stimulated by loud voices, laughing, clanking plates and the sound of a lawn mower next door. You try to initiate a conversation but you're too distracted by the noise.

Someone asks you a question but you can't form the answer fast enough and another person responds instead. Side conversations form around you but you can't break in. You find yourself isolated even among friends and family.

For an individual with a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) or Acquired Brain Injury (ABI), these are the very situations that can slowly result in social isolation.

As a speech language pathologist and ABI support group facilitator, I work with people facing these troubles, and I know that education and community resources are available to help.

A TBI is a type of ABI resulting from an accident or injury to the head, while an ABI is a broader category, referring to any acquired injury to the brain after birth, such as brain tumors and strokes.

The Centers for Disease Control estimates that 823.7 individuals in a population of 100,000 become hospitalized or killed as the result of a TBI each year, which does not include hundreds of undiagnosed TBIs.

Think of the brain as a person's computer hard drive. If it is damaged, it affects all function, including aspects of interaction with others.

Very often, individuals with a TBI or ABI may have no outward physical signs of injury. As a result, other people will often unintentionally treat them without the patience they require during what can be years of recovery.

Even friends and spouses can unintentionally mistreat and misunderstand the struggles of a person with an ABI.

Some individuals with ABIs also have trouble returning to work, driving, cooking and engaging in basic social situations. They need our understanding and patience.

Support groups can help. They offer a chance for people with ABIs to talk freely regarding their frustrations and progress, without judgment or fear. I encourage family members to talk with your family doctor or specialist about ABI resources in your area.

Finally, if you know a loved one who has suffered a TBI or ABI, try to recognize opportunities for these individuals to make their voices heard.

Give them the time and space to get their message out. It may be the difference between isolation and inclusion.

Heather Turner is a speech-language pathologist and ABI support group facilitator at Lawrence + Memorial Hospital.