Brain Injury Problem Checklist

**Directions:** Circle all the items that describe a problem that you have.

**PHYSICAL**

1. Tired
2. Moves slowly
3. Loses balance
4. Headaches
5. Drops things
6. Weak

**COGNITIVE**

1. Confused
2. Misplaces things
3. Loses train of thought
4. Thinks slowly
5. Trouble making decisions
6. Poor concentration
7. Forgets if he has done things
8. Forgets what he or she reads
9. Forgets names
10. Easily distracted
11. Other (list)

©2004 Virginia Commonwealth University
Brain Injury Family Intervention
BEHAVIORAL & EMOTIONAL

1. Frustrated
2. Bored
3. Restless
4. Impatient
5. Sad, blue
6. Lonely
7. Complains

8. Difficulty getting things started
9. Misunderstood by others
10. Jumpy, irritable
11. Other (list)

COMMUNICATION & SOCIAL

1. Difficulty thinking of the right word
2. Argues
3. Makes spelling mistakes
4. Thinks only of self
5. Uncomfortable around others
6. Writes slowly
7. Trouble understanding conversation

8. Difficulty making conversation
9. Writing is hard to read
10. Other (list)
The Family Change Questionnaire

1. How did you feel when you first learned that your injured family member was injured?

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

2. How did you feel when you realized that your injured family member was going to live?

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

3. How did you feel when you began to recognize that the brain injury might have long-term effects?

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

4. How have other family members reacted to your injured family member's injury?

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________
5. Have you made yourself available to provide more emotional support to your injured family member and other family members? If yes, how so?


6. Before the brain injury, what were the most important plans you had for your future and your family’s future?


7. How has the brain injury affected your plans for the future?


8. What responsibilities do you now have to care for your injured family member?


9. In what ways do you help your injured family member get back and forth to appointments?


10.
Do you attend therapy and doctors' visits with your injured family member? Please explain.

__________________________________________________________________________

11. Do you help your injured family member with filling out insurance, registration, medical and disability forms? Please explain.

__________________________________________________________________________

12. Do you help your injured family member get authorizations for medical and rehabilitative care? Please explain.

__________________________________________________________________________

13. Have you taken over responsibilities from your injured family member or uninjured family members? If yes, what new responsibilities do you have related to caring for the house, maintaining the car(s), working, paying bills, and caring for children?

__________________________________________________________________________
14. Have you changed your work responsibilities or hours since the injury, so that you could help your injured family member or the family? Please explain.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

15. How has your family's income been affected by the injury?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

16. What new expenses are you facing because of the injury?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

17. How have your sports, social, and recreational activities changed because of the injury?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
FAMILY CHANGE QUESTIONNAIRE

How did you feel when you first learned that your injured family member was hurt?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

How did you feel when you began to recognize that the brain injury might have long-term effects?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

How has the brain injury affected your life? (e.g., work responsibilities and hours, household responsibilities, time with friends, activities, financial situation)

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Which changes have been most difficult for you?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

How has the brain injury affected your plans for the future?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
4. Brain injury happens to the whole family.

Immediately after a brain injury, much attention is focused on the person with the injury. The ambulance crew rushes the injured person to the hospital where they're attended to by more than a dozen medical specialists. Soon after, your injured family member is transferred to intensive care, where medical specialists are on-hand 24 hours a day. For weeks or months, your injured family member may need professional help to eat, dress, walk, communicate, and get to the bathroom. Evenings may be filled with visits from family, friends, and other well-wishers.

Many patients who are discharged and some who don't require hospitalization also receive much attention. Family members may help them with dressing, bathing, cooking, managing finances, taking medication as scheduled, and other tasks of daily living. Transportation to and from doctor's and therapy appointments is often provided by family and friends. Friends and family are likely to be willing listeners who hear about the patient's symptoms, frustration, problems, and needs.
Sometimes family members take a long time to recognize the widespread effects of brain injury on the entire family. Changes affect your handling of responsibilities, feelings, and outlook on the future. Sources of change include:

- the emotional stress of learning that a loved one has nearly died and has been seriously injured
- the recognition that your injured family member’s life and your life may never be the same
- taking on additional responsibilities related to caring for your injured family member
- helping your injured family member get to and from appointments
- negotiating and dealing with complex health care systems and the paperwork presented by doctors, therapists, insurance companies, and disability benefits programs
- taking on additional household, financial, and childcare responsibilities formerly managed by your injured family member
- giving up work responsibilities to be more available to care for your injured family member
- reduction in family income because you or your injured family member are unable to work
- facing additional expenses which arise from medical and rehabilitative care
Your caring attitude, love for your injured family member, and commitment to help make it inevitable that you will be affected by the injury as well. Recognizing the effects of injury on you and other family members is an important step toward effective coping and planning for the future.

You and other family members are encouraged to complete *The Family Change Questionnaire* on the following pages, and in the back of the book. Review and think about your responses to the questions. Doing so will help you understand how family members have been affected by the injury.
5. Recognize that you may need help even though you haven’t been injured.

Since the injury, have you found yourself saying or thinking?

- How much longer can I keep going like this?
- I can’t stand the way things are going.
- Everything is going wrong!
- I can’t take any more of this mess.
- Nobody else seems to care, it’s all up to me.
- Nothing I do seems to make any difference.

These statements reflect feelings of being upset and overwhelmed, feelings that are common to family members after brain injury. Given the long-term nature of brain injury, no wonder many people get worn down by stress, added responsibility, and worry.

- How can I take time for myself?
- He’s the one that’s hurt.
Guilt is one of the main reasons why family members don't take good care of themselves after the patient's injury. Expressions of guilt are most common during the first few weeks or months after the injury—

- We were both in the front seat. Why wasn't I hurt so bad?
- We shouldn't have let him drive and stay out so late.
- I can't believe how bad off he is. There's got to be more I can do.

At least three forms of guilt are common.

- **Survivor's guilt** - feeling bad that the other person was hurt and you weren't. Some family members say that they wish they could trade places with the injured person.

- **Guilt at not having prevented the injury** - people spend hours wondering what they could have done or should have done to prevent the injury.

- **Taking blame for incomplete recovery** - family members feel that more recovery would take place if they could only do more for the patient.
As a consequence of guilt, many family members believe that they must focus 100% of their effort and time on the patient.

Is there an antidote for guilt? Perhaps there is. Try to understand, appreciate, and remember where guilt comes from and how it works -

- After brain injury, guilt is a natural reaction to three separate events. The first is seeing someone you care about in serious distress. The second is wanting to relieve the distress immediately. The third is not being able to resolve their problems immediately.

- Guilt is based in frustration and other painful feelings that are not helpful for solving problems. Caring, feeling energetic, committed, and positive instead will help you to effectively support the patient.

- Everyone, even the toughest athlete or soldier, needs rest. Nobody can go on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year. Taking care of yourself is one of the most important things you can do after the injury.
Your ability to help others depends on your strength and ability to think clearly in the long-term. Your strength depends on the things many doctors advise people to do: rest, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat right.

- Your injured family member is only one of many important family members. Neglecting the needs of other family members, especially children, can create additional problems.

- Asking others for help is not a sign of weakness. In truth, asking for help is good judgement, a recognition of being human and having limitations. Asking for help is also a good way to find resources that will get the family through a tough, long-term situation.
There are at least seven basic kinds of things you can do to help yourself. Some will help you directly, others will help indirectly:

1. ask other people to take on some of your responsibilities at home and caring for the patient
2. avoid taking on new responsibilities especially at work
3. if you take on new responsibilities make sure to give up some of your old responsibilities
4. seek and find additional sources of emotional support from family members, friends, professionals, and other families with similar experiences
5. remember your personal needs and involve yourself in activities you enjoy doing
6. to help you remain strong and focused, take breaks from helping even for a few hours or a few days; encourage friends and other family members to spend time with the patient
7. seek and find additional sources of help for your injured family member

You will need many skills to get you through brain injury: problem solving, stamina, insight, and communication. Taking care of yourself will help you be 100% and most effective in helping the patient.