

BRAIN INJURY HAS CHANGED ME

I need cheerleaders as I start over, much like children do when they are growing up. I need you to help me, and encourage all of my efforts. Please, try to be patient and understanding, not negative or critical. I am doing the best that I can.

As mankind learns more and more about our amazing brains, there are remarkable stories about healing in the news every day, so please do not confuse my 'hope' with denial of my present situation. No one can know for certain what my full potential is.

Hope helps me to employ the many, many coping mechanisms, accommodations and strategies that are needed to navigate my new life. Every single thing in my life has suddenly become extraordinarily difficult. It would be easy for me to give up without my hope. Thank you for understanding.



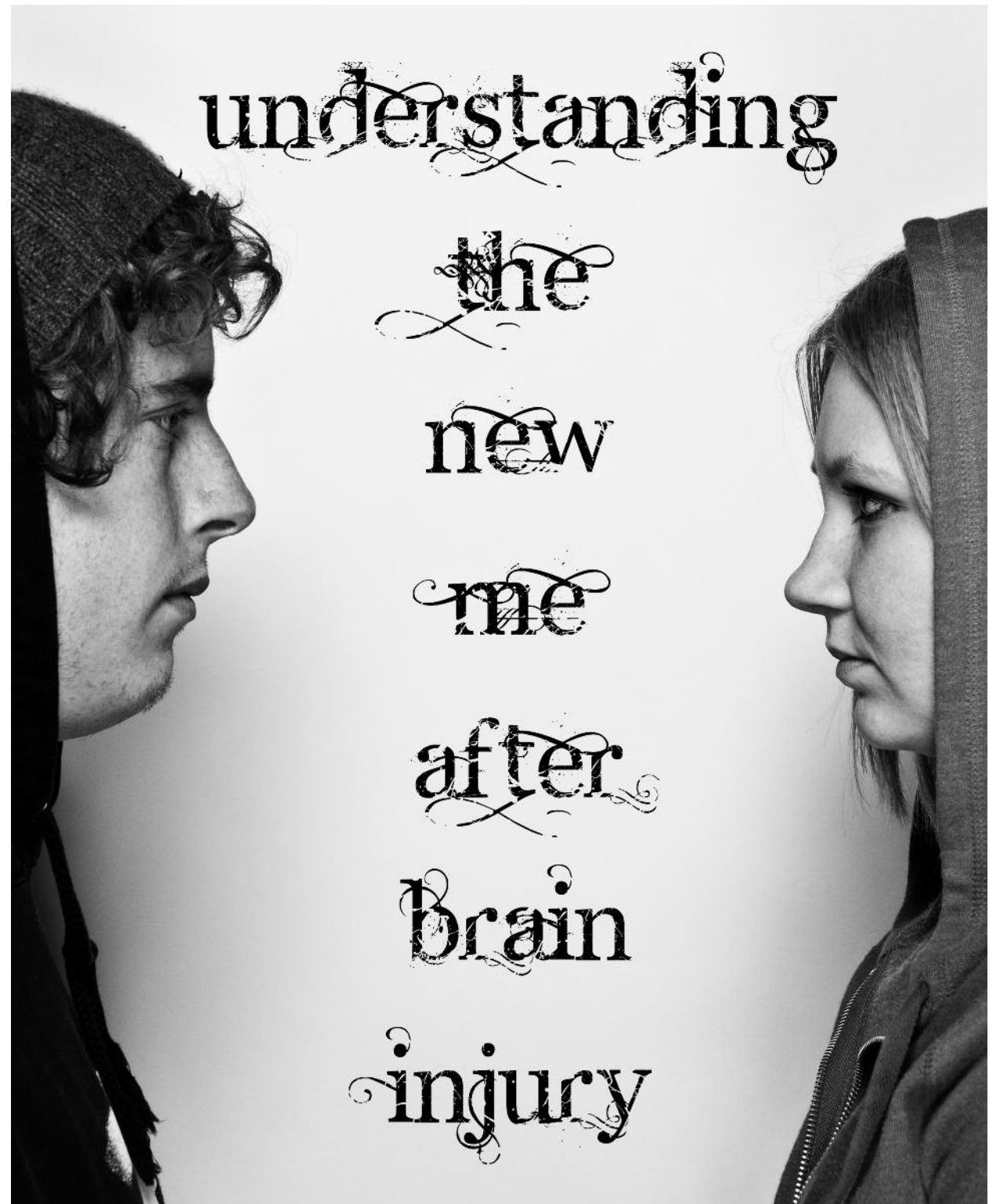
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I need a lot more rest than I used to. I'm not being lazy. I get physical fatigue as well as "brain fatigue". It is very difficult and tiring for my brain to think, process and organize. Fatigue makes it even harder to think.

My stamina fluctuates even though I may look good, or "all better" on the outside. Some days are better than others. When I push too hard it usually leads to setbacks, and sometimes, even illness.



Brain injury rehabilitation takes a very long time; it is usually measured in years. It will continue long after all the formal rehabilitation has ended. Please resist expecting me to be who I was, even though I look 'better'. While I may have healed on the outside, I am still healing inside.

Please understand that I am not trying to be difficult if I resist social situations. Crowds, confusion and loud sounds quickly overload my brain, because it no longer filters things as well as it use to. Limiting my exposure is a coping strategy, not a behavioral problem.



If there is more than one person talking, I may seem uninterested, but it is because my brain has trouble following all the different "lines" of discussion. It is exhausting to keep trying to piece it all together. I'm not dumb or rude; my brain is getting overloaded!

If we are talking and I tell you that I need to stop, I need you to stop NOW! I'm not avoiding the subject, I just need time to process our discussion, and to "take a break" from all the thinking. Later I will be able to rejoin the conversation and really be present for the subject, and for you.



Try to notice the circumstances if I begin to act in an unacceptable manner. It may indicate my inability to cope with a specific situation, and is not a mental health issue. It may be because I am frustrated, in pain, overtired, or there may be too much confusion and noise for my brain to filter.



Patience is the best gift you can give me. It allows me to work deliberately, and at my own pace, allowing me to rebuild pathways in my brain. Rushing and multi-tasking inhibit my ability to think.

Allow me time to find my words and follow my thoughts. Listen to me patiently and try not to interrupt. It will help me to rebuild my language skills.



You may not actually be helping me do something, if your help requires me to frequently interrupt what I am doing. I work best on my own, one step at a time, and at my own pace.

Please don't be condescending, or talk to me like I am a child. I'm not stupid, my brain is injured and it doesn't work as well as it use to. Think of me as if my brain were in a cast.



If I seem "rigid", needing to do tasks the same way all the time; it is because I am retraining my brain. It's like learning main roads before you can learn the shortcuts. Repeating tasks in the same sequence is a rehabilitation strategy.

If I seem to be "stuck", my brain may be stuck in the processing of information. Coaching me, suggesting other options, or asking what you can do may help me to figure it out. Taking over and doing it for me will not be constructive, and it will make me feel inadequate. (It may indicate that I need to take a break.)



Please have patience with my memory. Know that when I do not remember, it does not mean that I don't care. My injury can make remembering things very difficult at times.

If I repeat actions, like checking to see if the doors are locked or the stove is turned off, it may seem like I have OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder), but I may not. I may just be having trouble registering what I am doing in my brain. Repetitions enhance my memory. (It can also be a cue that I need to rest.)



If I seem sensitive, my emotions may have been altered by the injury, or it may be a reflection of the extraordinary effort it takes to do things now. Tasks that use to feel "automatic" and take only minimal effort, now take much longer, require the implementation of numerous strategies, and are huge accomplishments for me.