



Be Pain Smart – My Role

Repairing my relationships

Connecting and getting on with others is an important part of life. Having a brain injury and chronic pain can change the way you get along with others. It can be helpful to look at how your relationships are going and, if needed, make a plan to get them back on track.

Be a coach

There are lots of changes that might happen to you after your brain injury, such as the way you behave, think, feel and move. Having chronic pain changes things too. It helps if the people in your life understand these changes and your recovery. Find ways to let them know what you can do right now and how you work within your limits. Teach them about chronic pain, why you need to do things differently and how they can help you to manage your pain. Coach them to understand why you need to take breaks and pace yourself. This makes it easier for them to support you. If you find it difficult to talk about this with others, ask a trusted family member, friend or healthcare worker to help you have these talks.

The little things count

Improving your relationships does not mean that you must change everything, but you can make a few small changes. If you do these enough this can make a big difference over time.

You have different kinds of relationships with different people. Click on the links below to read tips to help your relationships.

- [Spouses, intimate partners or significant others](#)
- [Children](#)
- [Friendships](#)



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TIPS FOR RELATIONSHIPS WITH SPOUSES, INTIMATE PARTNERS OR SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

Create daily moments of connection

Spend around 15-20 minutes chatting with your partner each day. You could go for a walk together or sit down for a meal or drink. Talk about your day and what went well for both of you and try not to focus on problems in your relationship, or ongoing issues – this is your time to connect with each other.

Bond even when you are apart. When you or your partner leave, make sure you say goodbye and show affection to each other. You could also try sending positive, loving messages to your partner during the day to help you both feel connected. These small daily acts can help to grow your relationship.

Actions speak louder than words

Thoughtful and loving acts you do for your partner are often more important than the words you say. Try doing daily acts of kindness and love to show your partner you care. For example, you could help them finish tasks or run an errand. Even a small gesture like making your partner a cup of tea or coffee can show you care. This can help build shared goals in your relationship. Make plans to celebrate the important days too, like your anniversary and birthdays. This can all help you to build a solid base for your relationship.

Words are important too

In the day-to-day rush of life, it can be easy to focus on the things that go wrong and complain about what others did or did not do. It is important to talk kindly to the people around you and say out loud how you feel about them, and how thankful you are for their help and support. Keep reminding each other of the reasons you love and care about one another and give praise when they do the right thing.

It seems simple but using words such as 'please', 'sorry', and 'thank you' are helpful too. Make the effort to say sorry if you have hurt your partner and take responsibility for your part in any fights (even it was accidental). Learning to ask for forgiveness will help, but letting yourself forgive others is just as important.



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Mending after a fight

It is normal to have a fight with your partner every now and then. You might not be able to fix things right away, but it is important to show your partner that you are trying to mend the relationship. Start by letting them know that you are taking responsibility for your part in the fight and saying you are sorry for hurting them.

It can be hard for you to see when your actions turn into a pattern or habit, but if you keep having the same fight or your partner tells you that you are doing the same thing wrong, it could be time to talk about making a plan to manage your behaviour. Maybe you forget things or get worked up easily. Being aware that this is a problem and making a plan you can follow will help to mend your relationship.

Set a date night

Make a time each week or fortnight to be with your partner, just the two of you, for two hours or more. You can go out or stay home but do something you both enjoy or can share. This could be a movie night, special dinner, video game or any activity where you spend time with each other. Use the time to think about the good parts of your relationship, ask your partner lots of questions and listen to what is important to them. Remember to pay attention to them, get rid of distractions, turn your phones off and if you have kids, get a babysitter or wait until they are asleep and keep this time just for the two of you. Even when life gets busy, stick to your plan and reschedule if you need to.

TIPS FOR REBUILDING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CHILD/CHILDREN

Children react to a parent with chronic pain in different ways. The child's age, maturity and relationship to the parent will all play a role. Keep that in mind when reading the tips below to help your child, or children, handle these changes.

Talk to your child about your pain

You might need to do this a few times, especially as they get older. Keep it simple, and appropriate for their age, and give lots of comfort and reassurance.

Give them time to talk too

Your child might have questions or worries about your pain and what it means for you and for them. Try not to get upset by these questions. Take your time and answer them as best you can.



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Keep to your normal routine as much as you can

Stick to set times for meals, school pick-up and other activities. This helps to give your child security and comfort.

Let them show their feelings

It is normal for children to have strong emotions when you cannot do things they would like you to do. Tell them it is okay to be sad or angry, let them say how they feel and teach them helpful ways to manage their emotions.

Check in with your child's teacher every so often to see how your child is coping at school

Many schools have wellbeing programs or school counsellors to provide extra support.

Get them to help

There are many ways your child could help around the house, such as cleaning their room, loading the dishwasher or folding the washing. They might not be keen at first, but over time it will become a normal part of life. Noticing the helpful jobs they do and giving praise will go a long way. By doing this, you are teaching them life skills. Keep the jobs suitable for their age and try not to give too many jobs to older children.

Plan and pace yourself

If you know you have an important school event coming up, try to plan the rest of your week around this and add in more rest breaks. Pace your time at the event – sit down for a while if you need to and try to change positions often.

Find new ways to bond

If you can no longer do the things you enjoyed together, find new ways to spend or enjoy time together. Keep it simple. Watch a favourite show, read books or go for a walk together.

Just spend time together

Children can benefit from just being with their parents, no matter what the activity is. Try sitting next to them while they do their homework or reading a book in the same room.

Build a support network

Connect with other parents with similar aged children to help each other with drop-offs and pick-ups. You can also remind each other about upcoming homework and school events.



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TIPS FOR REBUILDING FRIENDSHIPS

Set a time to catch up

Make a plan with your friend, or friends, for regular catch ups. This might be every week or every month. It does not matter how often you catch up, but it is important to have a plan to keep connecting with each other. Try to keep it at the same time and day each time; for example, having breakfast on a Saturday morning every month or meeting at the pub every Friday night. Put a reminder in your phone to keep the plan.

Ask for help

It can be hard to ask for help, but good friends want you to get better and make your life easier. Give them clear and simple practical ideas for how they can support you. For example, you might need the kids picked up from school, help carrying the groceries or a lift to a doctor's appointment.

Remember to help them too

There are lots of things you can do to help your friends. Ask them what they need and, together, talk about how you can make this work for you.

Be honest

There can be lots of ways that a brain injury and chronic pain can change you. Tell your friends how they can support you. Maybe you can only walk for 10 minutes before you need to rest. Let them know so that they can remind you to take a break and you can plan it into what you are doing. You might have memory problems and forget to reply to messages. Let your friends know to send you a reminder message. When they know how to support you, there will be less misunderstandings and it will be easier to enjoy your time together.

Make new friends

Join a brain injury or pain support group in your local area. Finding people who have lived through a similar experience and can relate to how you feel, is valuable. These groups can be a safe place to talk about how your brain injury has changed your life and the challenges you face managing your pain. Some groups plan outings together and this can help you to get out more and start enjoying activities again.



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My plan to repair relationships

Pick a relationship that is important to you, but is facing some tension. Think about how you would like the relationship to be different and select tools from the tips above to help you make a plan to repair your relationship. Here is an example.

Which relationship do you want to work on?

My relationship with my wife.

What is working in your relationship now?

*We usually talk nicely to each other. I make sure I say goodbye when she leaves in the morning.
We hold hands when we go out.*

What is not working in your relationship now?

*I keep forgetting our plans and do not remember until we fight. I feel like she does not listen to me or care about what I have to say.
When my pain gets bad, I can snap easily.
We do not spend time together on our own – the kids are always with us.*



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What do you want your relationship to be like?

I want things to go back to how they were before, but that is not going to happen. I would like to be able to remember our plans, but mostly I want to spend more time together – just on our own.

I want her to understand why I can do things some days and some days I cannot. I want to stop snapping and getting cranky when my pain is bad.

Pick two tips you can use to start to make things better

1.

Date night – I find it hard to go out to dinner, but we can have takeaway at home and watch a movie. We can have dinner after the kids go to bed.

2.

Actions – I wake up first, so I will make her a cup of tea in her favourite mug every morning and bring it to her in bed.

Now it is your turn to repair a relationship.



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My plan to repair relationships

Pick a relationship that is important to you, but is facing some tension. Consider how you would like the relationship to be different and select tips from above to help you make a plan to repair your relationship. Write down your answers below.

Which relationship do you want to work on?

What is working in your relationship now?

What is not working in your relationship now?



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What do you want your relationship to be like?

Pick two tips you can use to start to make things better

1.

2.