

## Brain Injury and Mental Health

Children and adults can experience Mental Health challenges following brain injuries. These challenges range from anxiety and depression to personality changes and psychotic disorders.

### One Third

6 months to 1 year following an injury: one third will experience a mental health problem – that number will grow over time.

### 2 - 4 Times

People with BI have a 2-4 times increased risk of attempting or having death by suicide.

### 75%

As high as 75% of people seeking mental health and substance use treatment also have a brain injury.

## Best Practices

The Mental Health System should:

- SCREEN for prior history of Brain Injury
- ASSESS Cognitive & Functional Impairment
- EDUCATE staff on Brain Injury
- EDUCATE the person about their Brain Injury
- PROVIDE and TEACH Accommodations
- CONNECT person served with Community Resources

## COMMON PROBLEMS

After Brain Injury, we often see problems with:

- Attention, memory and new learning
- Slowed speed of processing
- Organization, problem solving & impulsivity
- Irritability, frustration & agitation

Balance, dizziness & headaches  
Poor awareness of deficits & difficulties  
Difficulty being flexible, poor self-monitoring

Mental Health personnel may see:

Looking uninterested because they cannot pay attention  
Appearance of defiance because they cannot remember the rules  
Slow to follow directions because they cannot process quickly  
Getting into fights because of irritability, anger and impulsivity  
Falling into things, often getting hurt  
Difficulty engaging in the community because of cognitive changes  
Gets stuck on an idea or a way of doing something, does not recognize mistakes

“Mental illness is no one’s fault. For many people, recovery - including meaningful roles in social life, school and work - is possible, especially when treatment begins early and the person plays a role in their own recovery process.” - NAMI

### Common Accommodations for Brain Injury Challenges

Here are some common and simple accommodations:

Working for shorter periods of time  
Getting rid of distractions around you, like noise or movement  
Taking notes (on paper, in a notebook, on a phone or computer)  
Using a phone to set timers to remember appointments  
Repeating information to the person  
Slowing down when talking; giving them more time to respond  
Giving the person a list of house rules, written directions, or pictures to help them understand and remember  
Coaching the person with the injury to “Stop, think and plan” then act  
Coaching the person to take deep breaths when feeling angry or anxious

### Tools for Best Practice

Brain Injury Screening Resources:

NASHIA’s OBISSS: <https://www.nashia.org/obisssprogram> - The OBISSS is highly recommended. It is made up of the OSU screening tool, a Symptoms Questionnaire and Strategies. It can be used electronically, on a computer, phone or ipad. It can be self-administered.

OSU TBI Identification Method: <https://wexnermedical.osu.edu/neurological-institute/neuroscience-research-institute/research-centers/ohio-valley-center-for-brain-injury-prevention-and-rehabilitation/osu-tbi-id>

Brain Links' Strategies & Accommodations Tool: <https://www.tndisability.org/rehabilitation>

Symptom Questionnaire and Cognitive Strategies:

Adult: [bit.ly/3FLkz0V](https://bit.ly/3FLkz0V)

Juvenile: [bit.ly/4iS2bSC](https://bit.ly/4iS2bSC)

## Tennessee Resources

Brain Links' Website with many resources: [tndisability.org/brain](https://www.tndisability.org/brain)

Brain Links' Toolkits (for Service Professionals and Survivors):

<https://www.tndisability.org/brain-toolkits>

TN Department of Health TBI Program:

<https://tinyurl.com/3v5jrdt3>

Tennessee Brighter Futures' Resource Pages & Training for Brain Injury:

<https://www.tndisability.org/tbf-brain-injury>

Resource Pages & Training for Mental Health

<https://www.tndisability.org/tbf-mental-health>

Tennessee Brighter Futures is organized and facilitated by Brain Links through a contract from the Tennessee Department of Health TBI Program

## References:

National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI), [nami.org](https://nami.org)

Administration for Community Living Behavioral Health Guide: Considerations for Best Practices for Children, Youth and Adults with Traumatic Brain Injury. May 2022.

Corrigan, JD and Dettmer, JL. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2021).

Treating Clients with Traumatic Brain Injury (Updated). Advisory.

4/2025 rev