

Let's Talk About...

Brain injury: Creating a healing environment

Children who have had a brain injury often have trouble handling activity, noise, and light after their injury. This may last for a while.

Your child's brain receives information all the time. This happens when they see, hear, touch, taste, or smell something. This large amount of information can be hard to handle after a brain injury. Your child may feel frustrated, overwhelmed, confused, or afraid. They may not be able to tell you what they need or that they feel unable to change their surroundings.

It is important to know the signs of when your child is struggling or feeling overwhelmed. There are few ways that you can provide a healing environment for your child.



What are some irritants or triggers that may overload my child?

- Not being able to communicate wants and needs
- Unfamiliar environment
- Noise from visitors, people talking, beeping, television, or music

- Unwanted touch (bunched blankets, twisted or tight clothing, bandages, massages, hand patting, or itching)
- Sunlight, overhead lights, and light from television or computer screens
- Not getting enough sleep or not having rest periods between activities
- Pain
- Bowel or urinary problems (bedwetting and constipation)
- Hospital cares (having blood pressure taken, physical exams, or dressing changes)

What are the signs that my child is overwhelmed?

Children who are overwhelmed may be:

- Confused
- Irritable
- Angry
- Frustrated
- Moody
- Aggressive (kicking, hitting, biting, yelling, or threatening)
- Restless and repeat actions (rubbing their head or kicking their legs)
- Withdrawn (not talking or interacting with people)

What can I do to help my child?

Create a calm environment

- Decrease noise
- Turn off the television
- Use low voices to speak near your child
- Talk to visitors outside your child's room
- Close your child's door
- Play soft, calm music for a short time

Keep room lights dim

- Use indirect lights
- Do not use bright overhead lights
- Close blinds
- Turn off electronic devices
- Close the room door

Limit visiting

- Only have visitors after your child has had rest
- Limit the number of visitors in the room at a time
- Encourage low voices during the visit
- Only allow visitors to stay in your child's room for a short time
- Use family areas and waiting rooms for the visitors

Encourage your child's sleep

- Provide a quiet, dark room to sleep in
- Complete caretaking (changing their diaper and giving them medicine) at the same time, to encourage naps and longer sleep at night
- Follow a relaxing, predictable bedtime routine (bath, massage, and story time)

Control pain

- Reposition your child
- Try massaging your child
- Give pain medicine before activities that may cause discomfort

Manage bowel and bladder needs

- Change your child's diaper or underwear quickly when it is wet or soiled
- Offer the toilet frequently
- Prevent or manage constipation

Protect your child from harm

- Prevent your child from falling by helping them walk to or use the bathroom
- Remove sharp and dangerous objects from your child's surroundings

- Pad your child's bed rails as needed or consider a tent bed
- Protect your child's skin if they are moving repeatedly

Decrease confusion

- Have consistent people around your child and bring familiar items from home
- Develop routines and schedules for your child
- Use orienting cues like clocks, calendars, and signs
- Tell your child about the situation and who you are frequently (known as reorienting)

Prevent agitation

- Use simple, clear language in a calm, soft voice
- Create a calm, quiet environment
- Make sure your child can sleep at night and have a rest during the day
- Reassure and reorient your child as needed
- Explain what you will be doing before touching your child
- Allow rest periods between activities
- Notice the activities or the time of day when your child gets agitated

Calm your agitated child

- Give simple, one-step directions
- Tell the child what you want them to do rather than what not to do
- Offer the toilet
- Take them for a walk or push them in a wheelchair (movement is calming)
- Distract and redirect (change the subject or direct attention to something else)
- Give your child a break from the activity that may be causing agitation
- Do not try to reason with your child when they are agitated

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