

WEEK 1

UNDERSTANDING TBI AND SYMPTOM RECOGNITION

GOALS/OBJECTIVES:

To introduce members to the group and facilitate a conversation about their current understanding of TBI and its related symptoms. In this session, you will:

- Designate group rules and explain the purpose of curriculum;
- Facilitate psycho-education on TBI symptoms and symptoms recognition; and
- Identify a support person who can help you practice what you learn in this group
- Discuss how you experience and deal with triggers and symptoms
- Identify skills for coping with symptoms and the situations that trigger them.

TIME:

Allow 1.5 hours for the session.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS:

A minimum of four participants is recommended.

WEEK 1

PREPARATION



VIDEO

Watch the following video:

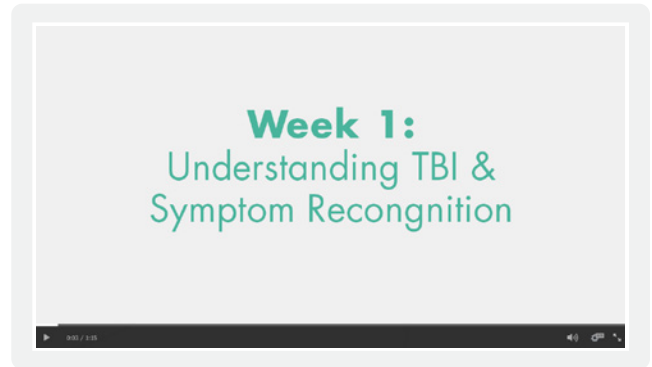
https://youtu.be/r_PfzyKW6Wo



PRINT HANDOUTS

- TBI Symptoms
- 4-7-8 Breath Relaxation Exercise
- Dealing with Triggers
- Symptom Recognition Log

These handouts should be distributed to the group at the points indicated throughout the session. They can be found in the handouts section of week 1.



WRITE

Write the following learning objectives on the white board so that participants may reference them throughout the treatment group:

- What is a Traumatic Brain Injury?
- TBI Symptoms - What are they?
- Break
- Dealing with Triggers
- Reflection/Homework

WEEK 1

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES



ESTABLISH GROUP RULES

5 MINUTES

Now we are going to review the rules that we will follow throughout the duration of this treatment group. If you have any questions about any of the group rules, I can help to clarify what is meant by that rule.

- 1. Confidentiality:** The information we discuss in this group is private, and members are expected to keep it that way. What is discussed in the group may be highly personal at times, and should not be discussed outside of the group.
- 2. Respect:** Give your attention and consideration to your fellow participants, and they will do the same for you. Examples of respectful behavior include: Not talking over each other and paying attention to the person talking (listen, don't just wait for your turn to talk). Encouraging each other by responding to each other in a positive manner. *Have the participants give other examples of how to show respect, and add those to the list as desired.*
- 3. Participation:** You are expected to take part in the discussion and contribute to this group. The pace of this group, however, may limit some participation. Often individuals who have TBI struggle to stay on topic. Let's briefly discuss one way that the group leader(s) can signal you if you are off topic and/or when we need to wrap up discussion and move on.

Note: Ask the group participants what other rules they believe should be in place, and add them to the list if they are applicable and constructive rules that are agreed upon by most or all the group members. It may be helpful to write the group rules on the board, or to create a written list on a large sheet of paper that may be posted in the group room for easy reference. Be sure to communicate to participants the expectations you have for their behavior (for example, how you would like people to excuse themselves from the group if a break becomes necessary, how the group should handle conflicts among group members, etc.). Setting these specifics out ahead of time will help to avoid confusion when these situations inevitably occur.



DISCUSSION PROMPT

What other rules does the group want to establish?



ICE BREAKER AND INTRODUCTION

5-10 MINUTES

WRITE the following self-introduction questions on the white board so members can refer to them. (You may want to do this before the group starts to save time.)

- If you were a superhero, which superhero would you be, and why? What would your superpowers be? (You can make up your own superhero, or pick one from pop culture)
- What is one thing you want to get out of this group?



EXPLAIN THE NATURE AND PACING OF THE GROUP

2-5 MINUTES

- Because we only have an hour and a half for each group meeting, it is important that we cover everything that is necessary.
- I will provide a brief overview of what each group will be about, and then I will guide you through several topics about TBI (such as symptoms, symptom recognition, triggers, effective habits, stress management, etc.).
- **Important:** To get through all the material, I will be keeping us on point by giving reminders when that section's time is almost up. If we are off-topic, I will redirect you to the relevant topic. If you would like to continue to discuss the topic that I redirected you from, please let me know after group so that we can discuss it at greater length. If necessary, we'll use the signal we agreed upon earlier to wrap up discussions.

WEEK 1

CONTENT



CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF TBI

5-10 MINUTES

Ask participants to share their current understanding of the effect of their own TBI.

- What do you know about TBI in general?
- What has changed for you since you experienced your TBI?
- What symptoms do you know of that are associated with TBI?
- What symptoms have you experienced in yourself or noticed in others?



TBI SYMPTOM EDUCATION

10-15 MINUTES

Provide group with the TBI symptoms handout refer to during this psychoeducational section. Ask the following questions:

- What is TBI? What are its causes/effects?
- How is it different from bodily injury?
- How does TBI change your life?

1. TBIs, like any kind of illness or injury, have certain kinds of associated symptoms.

2. Many of these symptoms fall into one of four categories:

- Thinking/remembering
- Physical
- Emotional/mood
- Sleep

3. These symptoms could include





- Difficulty thinking clearly
- Balance problems
- Sleeping more than usual
- Irritability (explain if needed)
- Sensitivity to light

4. There are many cognitive issues that TBIs can cause as well.

- **Executive Functioning** refers to multi-tasking, making decisions, starting/stopping tasks and activities, and processing input from your environment. All these areas can be affected. *(Explain how these may be affected using the examples from the chart on page 13.)*
- **Issues staying focused** on certain tasks (problems with attention).
For example: forgetting to complete tasks you've started, such as putting in a load of laundry but becoming distracted and forgetting to move it to the dryer.
- **Difficulty controlling impulses** (reckless behaviors or difficulty "putting on the brakes"). *For example: When in an argument with someone, you find yourself unable to calm down, despite the urging of others and despite knowing you should walk away. Without thinking of the consequences, you may engage in behaviors you will later regret, such as physical violence or saying things in anger that you do not mean.*
- **Indecisiveness in situations.**
For example: When confronted with a seemingly easy decision, such as what to buy at the grocery store, you waffle back and forth and are unable to easily settle on one choice.
- **Poor long-term planning.** You may not be easily able to keep your eye on the future or be mindful of the long-term consequences of the choices you make today. *For example, you may impulsively decide to purchase something that is out of your price range because you really like or want it, without taking into consideration that you do not have the savings in place to pay for it without going into debt.*

- You may have **long-term and short-term memory issues** from loss of consciousness or being dazed. You may struggle to remember details of your injury, may struggle to remember the details of conversations and interactions with others, and may find it difficult to recall certain periods in your past.

Below is a chart outlining TBI symptoms. Use it as reference for the symptoms you will list on the board throughout the discussion.

<p>PHYSICAL</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headache • Nausea • Vomiting • Balance problems • Dizziness • Vision problems • Fatigue • Sensitivity to light • Sensitivity to noise • Numbness/tingling in limbs • Feeling dazed or stunned
<p>COGNITIVE</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling mentally “foggy” • Feeling slowed down • Difficulty concentrating • Difficulty remembering • Forgetting recent conversations or information • Confused about recent events • Answers questions slowly • Repeats questions
<p>EMOTIONAL</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritability • Sadness • More emotional • Nervous
<p>SLEEP</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drowsiness • Sleeping less than usual • Sleeping more than usual • Trouble falling asleep



DISCUSSION PROMPT

These symptoms are very common in other medical or psychological issues.

In what way can they sometimes look like other things? (If not mentioned, bring up other issues that might have overlapping symptoms: alcohol and drug abuse, dementia, bipolar disorder, etc.).

Does having a TBI change who we are?

Does it define us?

Facilitators should think of examples to share (especially if the group is struggling with these questions), and may say something like: “Just as with any lifetime condition, having a TBI does influence some parts of how a person can interact with the world and function day to day. However, it is important to remember that a person is much more than their injury or illness. For example, you wouldn’t define someone with diabetes only as a diabetic and not as a person, because you would realize that there is much more to what makes them who they are. While it may be true that you are living with the effects of TBI, what is more important is that you are LIVING! You are constructing a complex life full of interesting experiences and people. Your TBI cannot and will not define you, as long as you continue to define yourself.

BREAK

5 MINUTES

Now we are going to take a five-minute break. During this break, we are going to practice a stress management technique (“4-7-8 Breath Relaxation Exercise” Handout, located in the Week 1 Handout section) that you can use when you are feeling angry or stressed; it is called guided breathing. Facilitator should read handout aloud.



SYMPTOM RECOGNITION

10 MINUTES

We are going to spend some time discussing how to recognize symptoms of TBI. To recognize the symptoms, you must be aware that they are present.

- How do we tell the difference between symptoms and other internal stimuli (example: psychosis)? Many of the symptoms of a TBI, such as intense changes in mood, feeling disoriented or confused, and difficulty resisting impulses, are similar to the symptoms experienced in other mental health conditions.
- How do we explain our symptoms to ourselves and others?
For example, you might explain TBI to a loved one by saying something like:

“Due to an injury to my brain, I sometimes have trouble remembering things and staying on track. As a result, I may need reminders and it may take me longer to read something, or to complete tasks, than it used to. What I need from you to help me is to_____.

(participants can fill in the blank)

I ask you to be patient with me as I learn how to function with these changes in my brain.”

Many symptoms of TBI have triggers. Facilitator should pass out “Dealing with Triggers” handout to group members, and read through the handout so that all group members are able to follow along.

WEEK 1

GROUP ACTIVITY



DISCUSSION OF SYMPTOMS

5 MINUTES

Break into small groups or pairs. Discuss the following:

- When have you noticed your symptoms happening?
- What makes them better or worse? (Stress, noise levels, etc.)

Bring the group back together after five minutes and discuss the following:

- Now that we have identified these, how can we increase our recognition of TBI symptoms?
- We will be exploring many different strategies over the course of this group, so – if you haven't learned any strategies previously, don't worry - you will get information on strategies that might be helpful. In this group, you will learn methods for managing your TBI symptoms and the stressors that may come with your symptoms.
- What are other ways we can help ourselves to be aware of our TBI symptoms?

WEEK 1

REFLECTION/ HOMEWORK



10-15 MINUTES

As we come to the end of our group, let's take some time to reflect on what we did today.

Facilitator should ask the group:

- What are things that went well?
- What are some things we could change for next time?
- What are some things you will take away from our group today?

Before the next session, I would like you to complete two tasks.

1. Identify someone in your life whom you trust, a person you will feel comfortable telling about this group and asking for help with some of our activities. This person can be a family member or friend- it's up to you. Let this person know that you are asking them to be your Support Person, which means that you will be asking for their help in practicing and staying accountable for the skills you'll learn in this group. Ideally, your Support Person should be someone who either lives with you, or whom you see frequently, so that they are able to help you on a regular basis.
2. Second, I'm going to hand out a worksheet that will help guide you as you try to recognize symptoms on your own over the time until we next see each other. Facilitator should pass out the "Symptom Recognition Log" Handout which can be found in the handout section for this week and read through the instructions on it with the group members.



DISCUSSION PROMPT

Do you have any questions?

WEEK 1

HANDOUTS

TBI SYMPTOMS

4-7-8 BREATH RELAXATION EXERCISE

DEALING WITH TRIGGERS

SYMPTOM RECOGNITION LOG

TBI SYMPTOMS

Brain injuries can range in scope from mild to severe. Traumatic brain injuries (TBI) can result in permanent neurobiological damage that can, to varying degrees, produce lifelong challenges for the individual. According to the Center for Disease Control, a brain injury resulting in altered mental status and/or loss of consciousness for up to 30 minutes may be called "mild." Unconsciousness lasting from 30 minutes to 24 hours is associated with brain injuries of moderate severity, while unconsciousness lasting longer than 24 hours (coma) are classified as severe. The effect of a traumatic brain injury on an individual's level of functioning afterward depends on the following:

- The severity of initial injury
- The rate/completeness of physiological recovery
- Which of the brain's functions are directly affected by the injury
- The meaning of the dysfunction to the individual (in other words, how reliant was the person on those functions before they were lost?)
- Resources available to aid recovery (medical, counseling, etc.)
- What areas of function remain intact and operational after the injury

EFFECTS OF A TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY CAN INCLUDE:



COGNITIVE DEFICITS

Cognitive deficits, including difficulties with

- Attention
- Concentration
- Distractibility
- Memory
- Speed of Processing
- Confusion
- Perseveration
- Impulsiveness
- Language Processing

Specifically, difficulties with **speech and language** may include

- Not understanding the spoken word (called "receptive aphasia")
- Difficulty speaking and being understood (called "expressive aphasia")
- Slurred speech
- Speaking very quickly or very slowly
- Problems with reading
- Problems with writing



SENSORY DEFICITS

Sensory deficits are defined as difficulties with interpretation of touch, temperature, movement, limb position and fine discrimination. These may include:

- A decrease in, or loss of, hearing ability
- Ringing in the ears (called “tinnitus”)
- An increased sensitivity to sounds
- Partial or total loss of vision
- Weakness of eye muscles and double vision (diplopia)
- Blurred vision
- Problems judging distances visually
- Involuntary eye movements (called “nystagmus”)
- Intolerance of light (called “photophobia”)
- Lost or diminished sense of smell (called “anosmia”)
- Lost or diminished sense of taste
- Inability to filter senses, easily overloaded



PERCEPTUAL DEFICITS

Perceptual deficits have to do with the integration or patterning of sensory impressions into psychologically meaningful data- in other words, difficulty in understanding and making sense of the goings-on in the world around you. Specifically, these deficits may include:

- Seizures, which are involuntary convulsions which can involve disruption in consciousness, sensory perception, or motor movements
- Physical paralysis/spasticity
- Chronic pain
- Control of bowel and bladder
- Sleep disorders
- Loss of stamina/energy
- Appetite changes
- Poor regulation of body temperature
- Menstrual difficulties



SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS

Social-emotional symptoms may include the following:

- Dependent behaviors (needing to rely on help from others to accomplish tasks)
- Emotional lability (mood swings, unpredictable emotional displays, intense moods)
- Lack of motivation
- Irritability
- Aggression
- Depression
- Disinhibition/Impulsivity
- Denial/lack of awareness

4-7-8 BREATH RELAXATION EXERCISE

Place yourself into a comfortable but upright seated position, with your back straight. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a “whoosh” sound.

- 1 Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four.
- 2 Hold your breath for a count of seven.
- 3 Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight.
- 4 That was one complete breath. Now, inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

FAQ:

Are the numbers important?

The absolute time you spend on each phase is not important; the ratio of 4:7:8 is important. If you have trouble holding your breath, speed the exercise up but keep to the ratio of 4:7:8 for the three phases. With practice you can slow it all down and get used to inhaling and exhaling more and more deeply.

Why should I do it?

This exercise is a natural tranquilizer for the nervous system. Unlike tranquilizing drugs, which are often effective when you first take them but then lose their power over time, this exercise is subtle when you first try it but gains in power with repetition and practice. Use this new skill whenever anything upsetting happens - before you react. Use it whenever you are aware of internal tension. Use it to help you fall asleep.

How often?

Do it at least twice a day. You cannot do it too frequently. Do not do more than four breaths at one time for the first month of practice. Later, if you wish, you can extend it to eight breaths. If you feel a little lightheaded when you first breathe this way, do not be concerned - it will pass.

DEALING WITH TRIGGERS

A **trigger** is something that sets off a reaction in you. Triggers can be internal (something that comes from a thought or emotion you create) and/or external (something in the outside world that causes you to react to it.)

INTERNAL TRIGGER REACTIONS INCLUDE:

- Feelings of anger, anxiety, or sadness
- Memories
- Loneliness
- Frustration
- Feeling out of control
- Feeling vulnerable
- Racing heartbeat
- Physical pain
- Negative self-talk

EXTERNAL TRIGGERS INCLUDE:

- Seeing something on the news or online that reminds you of your traumatic event
- Watching a movie or television show that reminds you of your traumatic event
- Certain smells
- The anniversary of a significant or traumatic event
- Holidays
- Visiting a specific place
- Seeing a person who reminds you of someone connected to your traumatic event

EVALUATE YOUR TRIGGERS

It is okay to sometimes avoid external triggers (as long as this avoidance doesn't negatively interfere with your day-to-day quality of life), but it is wise to continually evaluate your triggers and to practice good coping strategies. The physical and emotional symptoms of trauma can take some time to diminish in intensity. Continued coping strategy practice is essential. If you are struggling with symptoms of trauma, it is a wise idea to seek professional help from a counselor trained in helping clients process traumatic events. While it can be scary to ask for help, getting help in coping with your triggers will ultimately lead to a longer, healthier, happier life for you and yours.

When you find yourself faced with a trigger, do your best to ask yourself the following questions:

- What type of situation are you in? Are you safe?
- What is happening around you?
- What kind of emotions are you feeling?
- What thoughts are you having?
- What does your body feel like?

The following is a list of methods and practices for coping with the experience of triggers. More information on each of these methods can be found either within this curriculum or with a simple Internet search, and can be practiced on your own in privacy.

- ✓ **Mindfulness**
- ✓ **Safe place imagery/Guided visualization**
- ✓ **Grounding techniques**
- ✓ **Journaling**
- ✓ **Social Support**
- ✓ **Deep Breathing**
- ✓ **Coping Affirmations**
- ✓ **Relaxation/Self-soothing exercises**
- ✓ **Connect to your body**
- ✓ **Connect to others**
- ✓ **Regulate (exercise, focus on breathing, grounding)**

SYMPTOM RECOGNITION LOG

A helpful strategy is to create your own Daily Symptom Recognition Log. Each day, you should fill out the symptom log. Tracking the times and ways that you experience your symptoms will help you to better understand them, and that understanding can lead to better symptom management. Taking note of how you felt when you went through each symptom will help you to make a plan for how you are going to react next time you experience this.

Bring this log with you to the next meeting of our group!

Answer the following questions:

1. WHAT SYMPTOMS DID I EXPERIENCE TODAY?

(list the name of the symptom if you know what it is called, describe the symptom if you don't know what to call it)

2. I EXPERIENCED THESE SYMPTOMS WHEN I WAS

(list where you were/what you were doing)

3. I HAVE FELT THIS SYMPTOM BEFORE WHEN I WAS...

4. MY REACTION TO FEELING THIS SYMPTOM WAS...

5. THE WAY I REACTED MADE ME FEEL...

6. NEXT TIME WHEN I EXPERIENCE THIS SYMPTOM, I WANT TO...
