



You Are Not Alone

Whatever you may be feeling, relieved your partner is home, overwhelmed, angry, sad, frustrated, resentful, fearful, isolated, anxiety, guilty that a buddy died or was injured more severely than you, grateful for what you have, remember these feelings are normal, and you are not alone. Everyone who has experienced a traumatic or serious injury can have mixed feelings that can be very intense at times.

As Life Grows More Stable, Think About The Fact That You Are In Control Of Your Attitude

As time goes by, you may find it becomes easier to take a breath and think about moving forward and to understand how and what you feel. Consider that you can control your approach even though there is so much that has been out of your control. Your mindset is up to you.

The more positive you can be, the more likely you can see and use your strengths. The more likely you can see problems as challenges, the more you can handle them. When you convey a sense of confidence that everything will be OK, your child feels that way too.

Here are some suggestions you may decide to try for a more positive attitude when dealing with an injury:



Notice and enjoy small pleasures.

Your child's smile, a cooling breeze on a warm day, the smell of your morning cup of tea, the taste of a fresh peach are good examples.



Decide how you are going to feel-

No matter what is happening around you.



Talk with your child if and when possible about something positive that happened during the day.

Share three good things that happened to each of you.



Jot down two things you are grateful for before falling asleep.

It is a calming way to end the day.



Expect life to be bumpy at times.

Sometimes, you just have to make it through and adjust as you go.

No One Can Take Your Place

We've said it before, and we'll say it again: **No one can ever take your place in your child's life.** No matter what your injury, how much your family may struggle for a time, or how hard it is to be the parent who is not injured and find yourself in the role of full-time caregiver, you are at the center of your child's world.



Big Feelings for You



Figuring It Out Together

The effects an injury has on the family of the injured person can create deep feelings. You may be the person with an injury. You may be the partner whose world has been transformed as you notice changes in your partner’s moods or behaviors. You both must learn to cope with a new normal. These feelings are deep, and they can be mixed, and you may feel confused. This is natural and to be expected.

For example:



You might be angry at your spouse who is hospitalized even as you love her deeply and work night and day to ensure she is getting the care she needs.



You might feel grateful and fortunate to be alive and, at the same time, guilty that your buddy was killed and resentful when your partner tries to support you.



You may avoid the child you love because you don’t know how you can be a parent with a missing limb or an injured back that interferes with picking him up or playing the games of catch me that you used to play.



You and your partner might need and want the reassurance you give each other. At the same time, you may find it difficult to talk about what has happened or is happening, and you both may shy away from spending time in each other’s company.

Being aware of your feelings is important because they can catch you by surprise and *hijack* the emotional part of your brain (the limbic system), which makes it difficult for you to tap into the *thinking* part of your brain (the prefrontal cortex). This can make understanding, planning, problem-solving – those thinking skills you need the most to make it through a challenging time – more difficult.



Managing Your Emotions

Here are some ideas you may want to consider trying to help you manage your feelings, so, when those feelings become overwhelming, you can recognize them, cope with them, and get back to being thoughtful and in control:



Be aware that there will be big feelings and this is normal and to be expected.

This is a first step in being able to handle these feelings. You and your partner, then, can be emotionally present to support each other and your child. Try to understand what you are feeling and when you are over-reacting and your emotions are calling the shots instead of you.



Be aware of your comfort zone when it comes to sharing your feelings.

Talking about your feelings can help make them visible to think about and share with others. Some adults are more comfortable and find it easier than others to put their feelings into words. Some are more willing to share. Sometimes you might decide that a third person, like a home visitor, chaplain, or counselor, can help you get started talking.



Pause and take deep breaths.

Take a moment to think before you react. Being aware of your feelings can allow you to take a pause to think and respond in a helpful way rather than in an emotional way. When you do this, you help your child begin to learn how to experience intense emotions and manage them to solve a problem.



Engage the thinking part of your brain to help get your emotions back under your control.

Sometimes just being aware and thinking is enough to help you make the switch. For example, babies, toddlers, and twos can be noisy. That is a given. However, if too much and/or sudden noise upsets your Service member due to a TBI or PTSD, plan ways to give your child time for active play in other places, like the backyard, at a friend's home, or at child care. Designate a place for your Service member to go if quiet time is needed.



Talk your feelings over with someone you trust.

It can be clarifying to get another's perspective. There may be one or more people in your Circle of Support, such as a family member, friend, child care director, or your home visitor.



Having a Conversation When Emotions are Running High

Here are some ideas you may want to consider trying when emotions are running high:



Use I-statements to help avoid blaming.

When emotions run high, it can be natural to want to blame someone else for the situation. Using I-statements as in, "I feel this is a difficult time" vs. "If you would only listen to the doctor and do what she says..." invites you to describe how you are feeling or what you need instead of placing blame on your partner or someone else.



Listen.

When your emotions are racing inside, it can be hard to quiet yourself and genuinely listen to someone else. Being aware of this can help you take a deep breath (or 2 or 10 breaths) and turn your focus from your feelings to the words someone else is saying.



Try to understand what may be behind your partner's words.

Questions, such as these that follow, can help you better understand what your partner could be telling you: "What is she thinking?" "What is he feeling?" "What might she be telling me besides what her words say through the sound of her voice, the words she uses, and the expression on her face?"



Focus on how to move forward together– for yourselves and on behalf of your child.

For example, talk with your partner about how to make things work more smoothly. There are likely steps both of you can take. It can be helpful to start with the concrete. For example, this may include setting up a bedroom downstairs in the living room to avoid steps, arranging for a neighbor to cut the grass, or asking a family member to come to help with child care.



Playback to be sure you both are clear about what was said and agreed upon.

Checking in to be sure you both agree on the path of your conversation will prevent misunderstandings and is a way to promote your partnership and teamwork to move forward together. "Let's check in. For now, even though you are uncomfortable holding the baby, do you want to sit nearby while I hold her and you can talk with her?"