

BRAIN INJURY CAREGIVER GUIDE

LEVELS OF RECOVERY AND MENTAL FUNCTION

LEVEL 1: NO RESPONSE

Patients with this level of brain injury appear to be in a very deep sleep and do not wake up, even when you talk to them or stimulate them. They may be in an intensive care unit and attached to a machine to help with breathing.

LEVEL 2: GENERALIZED RESPONSE

Patients with this level of brain injury seem to be asleep most of the time. They may wake up slowly to noises, movement, or touch. They may make a face or groan when touched, such as when a nurse inserts a needle in their skin or takes their blood pressure. Patients may start doing simple movements randomly or when you ask them to “close your eyes”, “stick out your tongue,” or “squeeze my hand”. These are good signs, but you should ask the nurse or therapists about better ways to judge if the patient is consistently following commands.

LEVEL 3: LOCALIZED RESPONSE

Patients are more awake for longer periods during the day, and they respond to noises or activity around them more often. They may move their limbs and body in response to pain, follow a command, or react to sounds or voices.

SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERACTING WITH PATIENTS AT LEVELS 1-3:

1. Each time you see the patient, say who you are. Tell them the day, date, and time.	2. Avoid talking on the phone or leaving your ringer on at the bedside. Bring the patient’s favorite blanket.
3. Show the patient familiar pictures, such as photos of their friends and family, special events, or other memories. Hang pictures of the patient at the bedside.	4. Ask the music therapist for advice about playing music, which should be quiet and calming . Limit the amount of TV they watch, and keep the volume low.
5. Ask the patient to follow simple instructions, such as “raise your arm”, “close your eyes”, “stick out your tongue”, or “show me your teeth”. Give one direction at a time in a calm voice , and allow plenty of time for the response.	6. If the patient is alert enough, ask them questions about something that happened in the past that requires only a yes or no answer. Give them time to respond.
7. Avoid talking on the phone or leaving your ringer on at the bedside. Bring the patient’s favorite blanket.	8. Bring the patient’s favorite blanket.
9. Avoid too much stimulation at once by having only two visitors at a time . Only one person should speak at a time.	10. Signs of overstimulation include teeth-grinding, sweating, restlessness, agitation, and an increased heart rate.
11. A diary or notebook can be used by visitors to record events of the patient’s day. Later, this diary can be helpful in improving memory. The diary can also be a way for the family and the health care team to communicate.	12. Meet with the hospital staff to ask questions about the brain injury, and take notes to help you remember. They may not be able to give you specific answers about recovery time, especially when it is soon after the injury.
13. Look after yourself and the family by accepting help from friends and relatives , even with small things.	