

Maintaining healthy relationships

What is a healthy relationship?

- ▲ A healthy relationship includes: caring for others and others caring for you, mutual respect and trust, a person you can count on, open and honest conversations, mutual give and take.

Why are your relationships important to you?

- ▲ We all know the answer to this one, but it is important to note that having personal connections is in fact a basic human need. Relationships give us a deep sense of belonging and of being loved. After a life-altering event, such as an injury, we go through an enormous change process. Healthy relationships help us build self-esteem, improve mental and emotional health, and help us to live more fulfilled lives throughout this process and in the future.

The important role of self-confidence:

Confidence allows us to create new relationships, address pitfalls that may be happening in existing ones, and helps us to work on what challenges us in our day to day lives. Confidence also helps you learn how to self-manage your injury.

How can you help to build your confidence?

- ▲ By going on social outings, such as outings with rec therapy here at G.F. Strong. By practicing your care with your rehab team, working on your independence on a daily basis. By practicing sharing your story with others, building your voice in your experience.

The Five Stages of Grief and Loss:

There are five different stages that are common with people who are experiencing a loss of some sort, these include: denial, bargaining, anger, sadness, and acceptance. Some people go through these stages at different times, in different ways, and some may go back and forth from one stage to another over time.

Grief is not a step by step (or linear) process, but instead it is a fluid process. Everyone will go through this process differently, meaning you and your loved ones may be at different stages at different times. As well, you or they may never experience all of the parts of the process.

In summary, what is important to understand is that there is no right or wrong way to grieve what has happened, we all have a unique way of working through our experiences.

So why is this process of Grief and Loss important to understand for our relationships?

- By recognizing that ourselves and our loved ones are going through this process together, but possibly in different ways, and at different times, this recognition allows us to have a better starting point for communication within our relationships, and a better understanding of those relationships overall. Being able to talk with others about your fears, anxiety, goals and thoughts throughout this entire process is an important aspect of keeping your relationships healthy and strong.
- Example: You may be experiencing anger and your family member may be at a place of sadness, how would recognition of this difference alter the way you communicated?

Some common communication issues:

- Sometimes we push others away without even knowing it. Try to make a habit of checking in with yourself to see if you may be doing this - what are some ways this may happen?
- If discussions get too emotional, feel free to take a break, but it is important to set a timeline for continuing the discussion.
- Fears and concerns can affect the way you communicate. It is important to be true to yourself, even if this may be difficult, and share your concerns with others.

Healthy communication strategies will help to ensure relationships are strengthened during this time:

- Express your feelings without judgment
 - Use I statements: When you__ (identify the specific behavior) I feel__ (identify the specific emotion)
- Explore future goals, dreams, fears, and challenges together
- Pick your battles: Is it worth the fight right now? What can you let go of?
- Acknowledge other's feelings, and where they are at (verbally and non-verbally)
- Work to hear the other person in the relationship. How do we make sure someone knows we have heard them?

This is hard work and you are not alone. Please reach out for support from your rehab team and peers with SCI-BC.