

# TBI TODAY

News, Ideas, and Resources from the Virginia TBI Model System

## If I Look So Good, Why Do I Feel So Bad?

Brain injury typically changes the way survivors think and the way they react to other people. Survivors sometimes feel really bad when another person gives them a compliment or tries to say something nice. How so?

Imagine yourself at church, at the mall, walking your dog in the street, or at a party - and a neighbor or friend says to you -

**“You look great. When are you going back to work?”**

or

**“You look so good. When are you moving out of your parents’ house to live on your own?”**

People who comment on how good you look are mostly trying to be nice. If others are trying to be nice, **why do so many survivors feel so bad** when they hear these phrases?

Many problems left over from brain injury cannot be seen by others. Sometimes even professionals have a difficult time understanding or seeing the problems you have. Common hard-to-see problems after brain injury include:

- Trouble following conversation
- Headaches and other kinds of pain
- Trouble thinking of the right word
- Getting tired easily
- Difficulty remembering people’s names and what has been said

Most likely, the reason you are not working or going to school, or living with your parents is because you have serious problems left over from your injury, problems that are hard to see or explain. *(contd on page 2)*

(contd. from page 1) Others may ask about when your life will go back to normal. Their questions may be a painful reminder that your life is now different and difficult, and may never be the same. Most people have little understanding of brain injury. Sadly, their comments may leave you feeling misunderstood and alone. Others may also be confused about your injury because you are *pre-tending* that everything is OK and saying that you are perfectly fine.

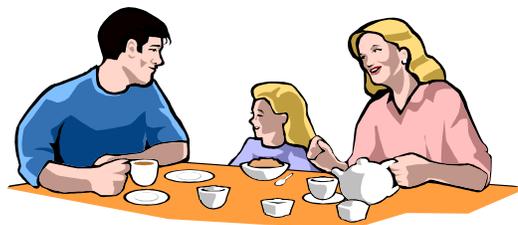
You can explain to people in detail what your problems are. Most survivors prefer not to give a complete description of their injury and left over problems in public. Others don't seem to care and won't give you the time to listen.

What can you do if you are *in public* and someone says, "You look great, when are you going back to work (or school)? Let's consider multiple-choice options. You can tell them:

- A. "It's none of your business when I'm going back."
- B. "Thank you for lying to me."
- C. "You don't know it, but my life is a horrible mess and I have no idea when I'm going back."
- D. "Thank you. I'm doing okay."



If you wish to avoid an argument or making a bad impression, choice "D." would seem like the best choice. When someone in public tells you that you look good, we suggest that you simply thank them for trying to be kind. You will feel better if you save detailed explanations of how you feel for private discussions with family members and friends, the people who you trust and care about you.



This article is adapted from the upcoming 2nd edition of "Getting Better After Brain Injury: A Guide for Survivors," by Jeffrey Kreutzer, Ph.D., a publication of the National Resource Center for Traumatic Brain Injury. For more information about the National Resource Center please visit our website [www.nrc.pmr.vcu.edu](http://www.nrc.pmr.vcu.edu) or email [jhmarwit@vcu.edu](mailto:jhmarwit@vcu.edu).

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