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Understanding your brothers and sisters after your ABI

Being in hospital not only affected your parents, it would have been a really hard time for your brothers and sisters too. They would have been very confused and upset. Like your parents, you love your brothers and sisters very much but they can drive you mad too.

This section will help you understand why brothers and sisters act the way they do, and can answer some of those questions about what has been happening to them whilst you were very sick in hospital.

It might help to read this section with your teacher, key worker or a parent so that they can explain the things you aren't sure of.

Getting sick – the effect on my brothers and sisters

The truth is your brother's and sister's life would have been turned upside down for all sorts of reasons. This is no-one's fault, this is just the reality. Any dramatic event in a family, such as getting sick or a relative dying, can have a huge impact on the family.

It is hard to say for certain what your brothers and sisters were told about your accident. It may be worth talking to your parents to see what your brothers and sisters know.

Everyone's story is different and each family is very unique. Not all of these things will apply to everyone, but you may read something here that sounds familiar. If you do, it will be well worth talking to your parents about it.

Your brothers and sisters worry about you

Brothers and sisters also worry a lot, as well as your parents. It can be really hard being a child and teenager because sometimes you feel that people aren't telling you things because they don't want to upset you.

There are many reasons why parents don't tell your brothers and sisters everything. This can be because sometimes it is very hard for adults to understand what is happening to you and they can find it hard to explain to other children what is going on. Maybe they didn't want to upset your brothers and sisters so didn't tell them everything that was





going on. This can cause problems though, because children are very sensitive and pick up on all sorts of things. Sometimes it is not what has been said, it is what hasn't been said. This can lead a child to worry.

Yours brothers and sisters feel confused

Parents can sometimes find it hard to explain to your brothers or sisters what happened to you. This can be because they are finding it hard to understand it themselves. Parents can sometimes go into 'denial'. This means that the events that left you with an ABI are so terrible they don't want to accept it is really happening.

This can make it difficult to explain to your siblings what happened to you because they don't want to believe it themselves. This can make you brothers and sisters feel very confused.

Over time, your parents learn to accept what is happening and are then in a better position to explain to your siblings what it all means. Before this happens though, there can be lots of frustrating questions that your brothers and sisters have but no-one seems to tell them what is going on. This can be very upsetting.

Brothers and sisters worry that they did something to make you sick

Some children worry that what they said or did caused you to get sick or have your accident and this can be very upsetting to them. It may sound strange, but sometimes brothers and sisters can wish that they got sick, and some feel guilty because it was you that got hurt and not them.

Most of the time, there is no good reason for them to feel like this, it is just their way of trying to make some sense of the situation. When dealing with painful events and memories, it is quite common to think of things that you 'could have done', 'would have done' or 'should have done'. Not a lot of good can come from this because whatever you think you should have done, it did not happen and you can waste a lot of energy pretending how different things could be. That said, everyone does it and brothers and sisters do this too.

Reality can be very painful sometimes. Maybe your brother or sister was around when you had the accident. Maybe it was just a very unlucky accident or maybe it was because you had been playing a dangerous game. The reasons aren't really important anymore. The





fact is, it happened and anyone who feels sad or guilty all the time isn't going to make anyone feel any better. Children can blame themselves for all sorts of things, but most of the time, it really wasn't their fault at all.

Brothers and sisters not see less of your parents

It is important to remember that there is no blame here. The truth is anyone can get sick and when people get as sick as you were it only makes sense that your family are going to want to be around you to help you get better.

Sometimes, brothers and sisters can feel left out because they don't get to see mum or dad because they were looking after you in hospital. Sometimes they may have to go away and live with a relative for a while and this can be really upsetting.

This can be tough for your parents too. They want to see you and they also want to look after your brothers and sisters. They can feel guilty when they can't do this. This isn't because they are bad parents, this is because worry and stress can eat up all of their time and your parents don't have time to give to your brothers and sisters.

My brothers and sisters act funny towards me

You might notice that your brothers and sisters have 'changed'. Sometimes, you don't know 'how', you just know that they are different.

Sometimes, your brothers and sisters have a hard time getting to grips with how you may have changed since your brain injury. This can be a hard thing to understand and so they might not want to play with you or do the things you used to do together. Perhaps they don't know what to tell their friends and are worried about how their friends might react.

My brothers and sisters have become 'all grown up'

Big stress in any family has all sorts of knock-on effects. This could be moving house or town, your parents getting divorced, or having to help your parents pay the household bills or do things around the house. This is sometimes called 'growing up at an early age'. It means that because of whatever situation, your brothers and sisters had to take on the role of an older child or, in some cases, the role of a parent. Older brothers and sisters can often almost become a parent to younger brothers or sisters.





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My brothers and sisters blame me for what has happened

Sometimes, your brothers and sisters can feel a bit neglected too. This means that they don't feel that your parents have any time for them or perhaps they feel that they can't talk to their parents because they are so preoccupied with making sure you are alright.

My parents are arguing and my brothers and sisters blame me

Great stress can also cause big problems in your parents' relationship. This can be because they are emotional and this can lead to arguments and people getting upset. Stress can do funny things and sometimes we can express our stress by 'taking it out' on things that aren't related. For example, feeling stressed at school can make you 'take it out' on your family. It is the same when stress at hospital causes your parents to argue.

Sometimes a big stress can make little problems in your parents' relationship seem bigger than they actually are. Because your parents are stressed they can argue and blame each other for lots of little things. This, in turn, can affect your brothers and sisters who don't like being around the arguing so find something else to blame. This can be you because you were unfortunate to get sick.

Family stress is a sad fact of life. Please talk to an adult you trust for some help. Things will get easier over time but you will need some help with this as you can feel that the world is against you

My brothers and sisters seem angry with me

Anger is a very common emotion for everyone to feel. Life is tough and throws some really unfair events at everyone. Maybe life was good before your accident and everyone at home was happy. Since the accident maybe things aren't so good. This really is no-one's fault, it's just acknowledging that hard times can make us angry.

Emotions are difficult for anyone to talk about, which is why we 'project' our anger or upset onto other people. It is easier to 'blame' people because it can be a very effective way of pretending that our problems aren't really happening or that they can be explained away by someone who has 'caused' all the trouble.





Sometimes, brothers and sisters can use you as the scapegoat because you got sick. This can be a tough time and you should talk about it with someone if you feel this is becoming a problem. This won't last forever. No-one can be angry all the time and over time, things should start to get better.

Try to remember everyone has their own way of dealing with things. They are only upset because you got sick and nobody likes to see anyone they care about get sick.

My brothers and sisters say some really nasty things!

This is all tied in with feeling angry. If things are really emotional it is not uncommon for brothers and sisters to come out with some really strange things. Try not to take it personally or take it to heart. They probably don't mean to upset you, it is just their way of trying to show how sad they feel. Sometimes things are said in anger because it is easier to blurt things out. Here are some things you may have heard:

- “I wish it was me who had the brain tumour!”
- “Why did you have to get sick?”
- “You get all the attention!”
- “No-one thinks or cares about me!”

These can be really hurtful things to hear. Talk to your parents about it and they might be able to sit down with your brothers and sisters and see how they feel about things. Talking about how we feel can be difficult to start with, but over time we can learn to talk about how what we feel and think without needing to get angry first.

What can I do now?

First thing's first! You are not alone! You will get through this and there is plenty of support out there for both you and your brothers and sisters. The best thing you can do is talk to someone you trust or someone from your school or rehabilitation centre. You could also try talking to your parents.

You will spend a long time adjusting to life with your brain injury and so will your brothers and sisters. It can seem very bleak for you all at first but things will improve just as soon as you have established a new routine.





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Times of great stress can bring families closer together as you help each other out. You might find that your relationship with your brothers and sisters improves over time and the more they get to know you, the more they will be able to help. Brothers and sisters can be the best friends in the world. Although things might seem stressful now, it is more than likely you will all grow together and become very good friends.

There are so many things changing at the moment and it can all seem like too much. Things change with time and people change too. Don't keep anything to yourself. Share it with someone and you will be glad you did.

