



Victims with Brain Injuries in Domestic Violence Support Groups

[Screening for traumatic brain injury](#) (TBI) at intake will help you identify domestic violence victims who need some accommodations to enable them to use your services. Providing such accommodations is your responsibility under the Americans with Disabilities Act. A victim who has a TBI could have difficulty participating in a support group. Ask her about the following issues.

Does she want you to explain the effects of her TBI to group members?

These may include:

- Being overwhelmed by too much emotional intensity – her own and others’.
- Not being able to pay attention for the whole length of the meeting, which does not mean she is not involved or interested.
- Forgetting what others just said.
- Repeating herself because she forgets what she has just said.
- Difficulty verbalizing what happened to her and trouble finding the right words.
- Speaking without thinking.
- Emotional outbursts.

You may see some of these behaviors in people with an unidentified TBI, and should ask them in private about being hit on the head.

What would she like group members to do?

- Refrain from talking over each other?
- Speak more slowly, or in shorter sentences?
- Repeat themselves when asked?
- Be concrete?
- Give her more time to speak?

What can you do as a leader?

- Make the support group as structured as possible.
- Focus on one topic at a time.
- Look for distractions that can be minimized – e.g. people talking over each other.
- If there’s a structured exercise, put the questions or instructions in writing.
- Don’t take emotional outbursts personally. It may help to take her to another room to calm down. Plan this with her ahead of time so it does not feel punitive.
- Be patient.