



Model Systems
Knowledge Translation
Center

Social Interaction After Burn Injury

A resource for individuals with Burn Injury and their supporters



This presentation is based on Burn Model Systems research and was developed with support from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR).

Visit www.MSKTC.org for additional Burn Injury resources.

Purpose of this Resource

- This presentation summarizes research on social interaction after burn injury.
- The information can help people living with a burn injury understand social challenges, figure out if they have social anxiety, respond to social challenges, and improve their social interactions.

What are some social challenges after burn injury?

Social Challenges After Burn Injury

Some social challenges burn survivors may experience include:

- Stares or double-takes
- Questions or comments about the injury
- Bullying and teasing

Understanding Social Challenges

- Social interaction can go wrong between a person with physical differences and someone meeting them for the first time.
- In the following table, the acronym “**SCARED**” illustrates how reactions on both sides can be misunderstood or cause discomfort.

Burn Survivor			Others		
	Feeling	Behavior		Feeling	Behavior
S	Self-conscious	Shy	S	Sorry, Shocked	Staring, Speechless
C	Conspicuous	Cowardly	C	Curious, Confused	Clumsy
A	Angry, Anxious	Aggressive	A	Anxious	Asking, Awkward
R	Rejected	Retreating	R	Repelled	Recoiling, Rude
E	Embarrassed	Evasive	E	Embarrassed	Evasive
D	Different	Defensive	D	Distressed	Distracted

Do you have social anxiety?

Indicators of social interaction anxiety after burn injury:

- Feeling nervous or on edge when meeting new people or among strangers
- Avoiding social situations
- Feeling isolated and alone
- Feeling emotional distress, including depression

How do you respond to social challenges?

Some ways that you can respond to social challenges

If someone stares at you:

- Say "Hi, how are you doing? Can I help you with something?"
- If staring continues, look back at them firmly and frown to show your displeasure.

If someone turns away:

- Think positively. For example, "They are just trying not to stare," or "They don't know what to do either."

If someone teases you:

- Stand up for yourself, be assertive
- Count to 10 slowly, don't be aggressive
- Use the power of the "I statement:" "I want you to stop doing that."
- Smile, act bored and walk away with a shrug.

What are some strategies to improve your social interactions?

The STEPS Strategy

The STEPS Strategy helps to improve social interaction it includes:

- **S**elf Talk - "I love and accept myself the way I am and the way I am not"
- **T**one of Voice - Friendly, warm, and enthusiastic
- **E**ye Contact - Look people in the eye, even if just for a few seconds
- **P**osture - Have a confident posture with head raised, rib cage lifted and shoulders back
- **S**mile - Makes you look confident and approachable

3-2-1-GO! Strategy

The **3-2-1-Go! Strategy** helps you to prepare for interaction ahead of time, think of:

- **3** things to do if someone stares at you
- **2** things to say if someone asks what happened
- **1** thing to think if someone turns away

How to Communicate with Confidence

It is very important to communicate with confidence. you can do this by:

- Making eye contact and smiling as much as possible
- Remembering to communicate with body language
- Standing tall
- Wearing something that makes you feel good
- Showing that you are listening by using eye contact, nodding and responding accordingly
- Looking interested in what other people have to say
- Sharing your own experiences

How to get more information or find help

More information can be provided to you by:

- consulting with a physician, talking with a burn center staff member,
- sharing experiences with peer support groups and,
- learning how to create your best image.

Resources

The Phoenix Society for
Burn Survivors Inc.
1835 R W Berends Dr. SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49519-4955
1-800-888-2876
www.phoenix-society.org
info@phoenix-society.org

Changing Faces
The Squire Centre
33-37 University Street
London, WC1E6JN
www.changingfaces.org.uk

References

- Blakeney P, Partridge J, Rumsey N. (2007). Com-munity Integration. *Journal of Burn Care and Research*, 28(4):598-601.
- Blakeney P, Thomas C, Holzer C, 3rd, et al. (2005). Efficacy of a short-term, intensive social skills training program for burned adolescents. *Journal of Burn Care & Rehabilitation*, 26(6):546-555.
- Kammerer Quayle, B. (2006). Behavioral Skills and Image Enhancement Training for Burn Survivors: Essential Interventions for Improving Quality of Life and Community Integration.” In R Snood, B Achauer, (Eds.), *Achauer and Sood’s Burn Surgery: Reconstruction and Rehabilitation*. Elsevier Inc.

For additional resources on living with
a burn injury, please visit the
Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center
website at www.msktc.org

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