

July 13th, 2011 Meeting Minutes
Young Adults with TBI Support Group
yawtbi.wordpress.com

This month's meeting had the topic of advocacy.

We started off the meeting by going through some announcements.

Next Silas led us in a discussion about advocacy wherein he introduced another member's ACTION PLAN about how to ask for help when needed and he also started the discussion about what to do when someone approaches you in an inappropriate manner asking, "what's wrong with you?" or "what happened to your XXX?"

It was brought up that in this sort of uncomfortable situation we should really try and remember that the person asking, although be it in an inappropriate way, is trying to connect and identify with you. We should try to see it as a teaching opportunity and try to engage that person and explain how their question made you feel. These situations can be great opportunities to teach people how to ask questions in a better way.

It can be pretty disarming to be caught off-guard with an inappropriate question so it can be very helpful to have pre-planned responses that make you feel grounded and secure. Humor can also be helpful in this. One group member even carries a 3x5 card with her in her purse with responses to common inappropriate questions that still make her feel powerful and in control.

Another tool that was discussed that aides in communication in these uncomfortable situations is code words. These can be code words said between survivors and care givers that signal that the survivor is uncomfortable and wants the caregiver to step in and help disarm the situation. These code words can also be signals for the survivor to give the caregiver that tells them "I've got this one" and explains that they don't want assistance.

And these situations can and often do include when people are staring. And staring is often just a sign of curiosity. Feel free to advocate for yourself to address an inappropriate stare. Just do so with grace. Sometimes it can be helpful to temper your response by thinking of an extreme version of the situation. What would you say if the person staring was a little kid? Start there.

For the second half of the meeting we broke into three small groups.

The first group spent some time getting to know one another and discussed overcoming negative emotions. They said that one of the best things that can be done to overcome negative emotions is to learn how to calm yourself. Once calmer you are able to address the situation more appropriately.

The second group talked about advocacy. They went into some code words that had worked for them and talked about how important it is for there to be a very well and obviously laid out plan

between a survivor and caregiver to ensure that the survivor has their needs met and is getting out of the situation what they would like.

The third group discussed stares and other negative people and how their actions can really bring about a lot of anger and frustration. A good response to this is to smile and wave. This group also discussed asking for help. They stressed that asking for help is NOT a one-size-fits-all kind of thing. They strongly encouraged to keep trying new strategies and see what works for you.