



Questions from families about the TBIconneCT program

What evidence is there to support the effectiveness of the training program?

The TBIconneCT training program is a shorter version of the TBI Express program, which has good evidence supporting its effectiveness in improving communication after TBI.

TBI Express, like TBIconneCT, involves people with TBI and their family member/carer completing training together. After TBI Express training, **people who received the training reported communication problems were happening less often** (Togher, McDonald, Tate, Rietdijk, & Power, 2016). Also, speech pathologists who were blinded (they did not know who got the training) rated the conversations of people who received the joint training as **better after the training** (Togher, McDonald, Tate, Power, & Rietdijk, 2013).

We have completed a pilot study of the new TBIconneCT training program with two people, to see if the shorter version done over videoconferencing would help people improve their communication skills. We found that these two people had **better conversations with their family member/carer** after the training, and **reported improvements** in their communication skills (Rietdijk, Power, Brunner, & Togher, 2018).

We have now **completed a larger study of the TBIconneCT training**. We will be publishing the results of this study later in 2019. Our first analyses of the data have shown positive outcomes for people who complete the training.

Why do family members or carers attend the training sessions?

Based on research (discussed in the above section), we have found **including family members or carers in training achieves better outcomes** than training the person with TBI alone.

This makes sense – after all, **communication is a shared activity** – it's not something you can do on your own. Other skills that people often need to relearn after a TBI, such as walking or showering, are solo activities – but for communication, you need another person! Including both the person with TBI and a communication partner in the training helps to give both people the skills needed for having good chats together, for negotiating different situations, and prompting cognitive and personal development.

We also know that **communication after TBI can be challenging**.

Communication partners are experts in what is happening for the person with TBI. This program is about adding to the skills that communication partners already have and developing new ways of looking at things. The program adds communication strategies to communication partners' toolkits, alongside developing strategies for the person with the TBI. We also recognise communication partners often feel they've been left to the sidelines and need support and acknowledgement of what they're experiencing.

People with TBI benefit from having an ally. Improving communication skills after TBI can be difficult. It is helpful for people with TBI to have a person in their everyday life who can practise conversations, remind about strategies, help with problem solving, and recognise progress. Having a person "on your team" can help to overcome barriers of memory, self-awareness and motivation that the person with TBI might have.

I feel apprehensive about my role in the training sessions – is this normal?

It is common to feel a little apprehensive at the start of the program. In our research studies, some family members told us that they initially found their participation in the program daunting. But as the program continued, they became more comfortable with the sessions. They said it was **definitely worthwhile to persevere** with the program – even if you feel a little uncomfortable in the first few sessions.

We recommend that you **discuss how you feel with your speech pathologist**. The TBIconneCT program provides space for discussing any concerns you have about the training and encourages speech pathologists and families to work together to resolve any issues.

Is this program suitable for my family member with TBI?

It is recommended to **discuss with your speech pathologist** the suitability of this program for your family member with TBI, and the best time to start the training.

In our research studies, we have included volunteers who were:

- At least six months post-injury – but it would be possible to do this training any time post-injury
- Have difficulties with social communication (i.e. the skills we need for having a good chat)
- Do not have severe aphasia (loss of language). We included people who had some ability to participate verbally in conversation.

What topics does TBIconneCT training cover?

The TBIconneCT training program consists of **ten sessions** which cover different areas. It is a structured program, but with space for tailoring the content to suit your goals. **Key topics** that are covered are:

- How does TBI affect communication?
- How to help your relative have good conversations, including:
 - Working well as a team in conversation
 - Keeping the conversation going
 - Asking good questions

How can I access TBIconneCT training?

The TBIconneCT training program will be available for speech pathologists to purchase later in 2019. You can **contact a speech pathologist through your local brain injury rehabilitation service**. In Australia, you can contact a private speech pathologist by searching “Speech Pathology Australia Find a Speech Pathologist”. The search engine on the Speech Pathology Australia website will allow you to search for a speech pathologist in your area (or telepractice clinics who may offer the program over videoconferencing). You can specify “Acquired Brain Injury” as the area of practice to find speech pathologists who have an interest in working with people with TBI.

References

- Rietdijk, R., Power, E., Brunner, M., & Togher, L. (2018). A single case experimental design study on improving social communication skills after traumatic brain injury using communication partner telehealth training. *Brain Injury*, 1-11.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02699052.2018.1531313>
- Togher, L., McDonald, S., Tate, R., Power, E., & Rietdijk, R. (2013). Training communication partners of people with severe traumatic brain injury improves everyday conversations: a multicenter single blind clinical trial. *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine*, 45(7), 637-645. <https://doi.org/10.2340/16501977-1173>
- Togher, L., McDonald, S., Tate, R., Rietdijk, R., & Power, E. (2016). The effectiveness of social communication partner training for adults with severe chronic TBI and their families using a measure of perceived communication ability. *NeuroRehabilitation*, 38(3), 243-255. <https://doi.org/10.3233/NRE-151316>