

BEYOND SURVIVING

TOOLS FOR SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT



HOW SHOULD I USE THIS GUIDE?

This guide was designed for burn care professionals, burn survivors and their loved ones alike. It provides concrete tools to increase social confidence and control. It can be taught/learned in sections to allow time for practice and mastery.

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FOR PROFESSIONALS

INTRODUCING SKILLS + TOOLS



An important aspect of patient care is introducing the topic of community reentry and the potential challenges for the patient and family. Some teachable moments appear daily when giving medication, offering a snack, a trip off the unit to x-ray, or later in the evening when the unit may be quieter. Below are some examples to assist you to develop your own personal delivery style.

THE INITIAL CONVERSATION

"Mr. Brown, you know you'll eventually be discharged. I was wondering how are you feeling about going home? (*wait for the answer*) Some people have found that leaving the burn center is a little scary, whether they're facing strangers or people they know. For one thing, you will have to adjust to doing more for yourself. The other adjustment is that you'll be noticed a lot more than before because of your burns (the bandages, pressure garments.) Some people may ask what happened and others might look at you or even stare...because most people just haven't known someone with a burn so they are a little curious and compassionate. We do have some tools to help you feel empowered and prepared. Would you like to discuss them now?"

THE S.T.E.P.S. TOOL

"Bob, when leaving the burn center and starting to go out in the community, some people feel a little uncomfortable at first because of the attention. How you present yourself will affect how people respond to you. For example, if I came in today with my shoulders slumped, had no eye contact with you, and didn't smile, you and I would have a hard time communicating because you would feel uncomfortable with my behavior. So, we have a tool called STEPS that are behavioral skills that can really help you project confidence in yourself. Even if you're not feeling confident, they will help you feel prepared. I'd like to go over the STEPS tool now if that's ok?"

REHEARSING YOUR RESPONSES

"Ms. Gomez, soon you'll be going home, and I wanted you to be prepared to go out in public again. Because many people don't know anything about burns, they may come up and ask about your injury. People who have heard about your injury might also have questions. People don't mean to be rude; they're usually just curious and compassionate. Sometimes people may approach you in the grocery store, walking through a mall, or even at a restaurant. Rehearsing your responses can help with questions and comments. We find if patients are prepared in advance with just 3 simple sentences, you'll feel more at ease and not be taken off guard. Would you like me to go over it with you now?"

THE STARING TOOL

"Emma, when you go home, it's important for you to start going out to do your usual activities. This is important for your total recovery. Some people in the community have not seen someone with a burn injury before. They may be so curious about your injury that they may stare at you. People don't mean to be rude. We want you to be prepared and have a tool to help you to manage any staring that may occur. It will help you feel in control of each social situation, feel more at ease wherever you go and not be surprised. Would you like me to show the tool to you now?"

SECTION 1

STEPS: A TOOL FOR SOCIAL CONFIDENCE



STEPS is a simple and effective tool for anyone affected by a burn injury. We can influence how people respond to us when meeting strangers; entering new social, work, or school situations; or going into public places. Using STEPS helps to build our confidence and send the message to others that we are self-assured—even if we're still getting there!



SELF-TALK. What we say + believe about ourselves.

TOE OF VOICE. Friendly + enthusiastic.

EYE CONTACT. Look 'em in the eye.

POSTURE. Up/shoulders back.

SMILE. Warm + kind.

- **Try practicing STEPS in front of a mirror.**

It takes practice until it becomes authentic, natural, and part of your daily life.

- **Imagine you are producing a TV commercial of yourself.**

Use STEPS to produce the confident and comfortable image you want to project to your audience. *You* have control over the image your audience views.

SECTION 2

RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS + COMMENTS



BE PREPARED

People with burns and their family members often report feeling awkward, angry, or embarrassed when strangers ask questions about their burns and injury. By memorizing and rehearsing your response, you can approach social situations and respond calmly to questions with courtesy, kindness, and warmth.

CRAFTING YOUR RESPONSE

Write and memorize a 3-sentence response for questions.

FIRST SENTENCE

How you or your loved one was burned/When the injury occurred.

Example: "I was burned in a house fire" or "My wife was burned three months ago."

SECOND SENTENCE

How you or your loved one are doing now.

Example: "I'm still having surgeries" or "I'm getting better all the time."

THIRD SENTENCE

Ending the conversation.

Example: "Thanks for your concern" or "That's all I feel like sharing."

LOW ENERGY

Memorize another option for when you don't feel up to questions. It is okay to be honest and confident in giving this answer too. Use this response if a person requests more information than you want to provide, or even if it feels like too much to have to answer at all.

Example: "I don't want to talk about it anymore today. Thanks," or "That's all I care to discuss today. I'm sure you understand."

SECTION 2

CRAFT YOUR RESPONSE



I survived a burn injury. I'm still going through treatment. That's all I feel like saying about it.

I was burned in a car crash. I'm doing a lot better now. Thanks for asking.

I don't feel up to talking about what happened to me today. It can be draining just to be up and about. Thanks for understanding.

WRITE YOUR OWN

FIRST SENTENCE

How you or your loved one was burned/When the injury occurred.

SECOND SENTENCE

How you or your loved one are doing now.

THIRD SENTENCE

Ending the conversation.

LOW ENERGY

Another option for when you don't feel up to questions.

SECTION 3

REACTING TO STARES



STARING IS A FACT OF LIFE

Before a burn injury, you probably shopped, attended movies, and walked through malls rather anonymously. Life changes abruptly after a burn injury. After discharge from the hospital, there could be unwanted attention. **Using the tools found in this packet can help both survivors and family members to have concrete skills to deal with staring.**

It is a reality of life that looking different draws attention. Our thoughts and self-talk can create all kinds of rationale about why people stare. Patients and family members can keep in mind that it seems to be part of human nature to look at people with some type of difference. In the case of children, their open curiosity may also show up in the form of staring. **People often stare out of curiosity or concern, and very few stare to be rude.**

We can take responsibility for our reactions to staring. Do not give power over your life to people you do not know and may never see again. This makes strangers more important than you are. Continuing to focus on whether people are staring at us prevents us from living in the present. Being fully involved in life without concerns about what others think or do increases the joy of life's journey. By using these tools, you will increase your social comfort and confidence when someone stares.

Some places where staring may occur include: while standing in lines, sitting in restaurants, shopping, and walking among large crowds. These activities may seem awkward and scary at first. **Until you are more comfortable and confident, taking a family member or friend along may ease anxiety.**

WHEN SOMEONE STARES

The easiest and fastest way to stop the uncomfortable moment is to use the following tools:

Stand up straight, look the person in the eye, smile, and confidently say, "Hey, what's up?" or "Hi, nice day, isn't it?" or any friendly small talk that feels natural to you.

The person staring usually responds in an equally friendly way, speaks to you, and the staring ends. By smiling and speaking to someone who is staring, you change the energy of the interaction and the person sees you as a person rather than focusing on your burn injury.

SECTION 4

CHANGING THE SUBJECT



THE ART OF CHANGING THE SUBJECT

Removing the attention away from your burn injury to another subject. Develop several conversation starters that you memorize and use.

- “That’s a very nice shirt (dress, sweater, coat, etc) you are wearing. did you buy it around here?”
- “Do you shop here a lot?”
- “We’re having some really great (or terrible) weather today, aren’t we?”
- “I really like this restaurant. How about you?”
- “How ‘bout those Cowboys?”

PREPARE AND PRACTICE

Use these life situations or ones that have happened to you.

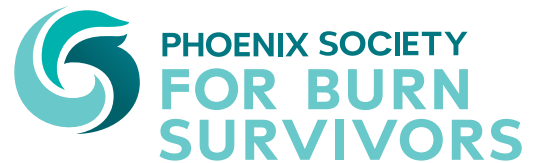
- A lady at the grocery store sees you, walks over to you and kindly says, “Oh, I bet you were in a bad accident.”
- Walking to school, a child says, “You really look bad!”
- In the check out line at a department store, a girl and her mom keep staring at you.
- A student across from you in class asks, “What did you do to yourself?”
- A young child appears frightened by your visible scars or assistive equipment.
- As you walk down the aisle while boarding a bus, train, or plane, several people take a long look at you.
- At a mall someone walks up and suddenly asks, “Hey, what happened to you?”
- While waiting in a medical office, you notice several people staring at you.

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

PHOENIX SOCIETY FOR BURN SURVIVORS

Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors is the leading connector for those affected by a burn injury, the primary resource for quality information and education, and the trusted authority for all in the burn community. We see a future where no one facing the life-changing effects of a burn injury is forced to journey through healing alone.



RESOURCE CENTER

Explore online learning opportunities like [Getting Back Out There: Tools for Social Empowerment](#) and [Supporting Burn Survivors: How You Can Help](#). Find these courses, as well as e-books, articles, fact sheets, and survivor stories, at www.phoenix-society.org/resources.

PEER SUPPORT

[Phoenix SOAR \(Survivors Offering Assistance in Recovery\)](#) provides in-person connection with others who have experienced a similar trauma. Join our weekly [Peer Support Chat](#) or our [Virtual Support Groups](#) to get support wherever you are.

JOURNEY MAGAZINE

A free publication for the burn community: resources, stories, and updates delivered directly to your mailbox. Subscribe for free: www.phoenix-society.org/magazine-signup.

CONNECT WITH PHOENIX SOCIETY

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