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Staring Is a Fact of Life

Before a burn injury, we shopped, attended movies, and walked through malls rather anonymously. Life changes abruptly when we suffer a burn injury. After discharge, there is suddenly a great deal of unwanted attention everywhere we go. It can be overwhelming for us and for our family.

Before and after discharge, patients and families need a "coach" who openly discusses the fact that people may stare. Our thoughts and self-talk can create all kinds of rationale about why people stare. It is a reality of life that looking different draws attention. Patients and families can be reminded that it seems to be part of human nature to look at people with some type of difference. We look at people who are deaf and use sign language, people in wheelchairs, people wearing native costumes from another country, and people whose gait is uneven because of a disability. People often stare out of curiosity or concern, and very few stare to be rude.

It is difficult to change the public and their reactions to a burn injury, but 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 the BEST "Tools," you will increase your social comfort and confidence when someone stares.

Staring usually occurs while standing in lines, sitting in restaurants, shopping, and walking among large crowds. These activities may seem awkward and scary at first. Until one is more comfortable and confident, taking a family member or friend along may ease anxiety.

Staring "Tool"

When someone stares, the easiest and fastest way to stop the uncomfortable moment is to use the following **STEPS** "Tools":

Stand up straight, look the person in the eye, smile, and confidently say, *"Hi, how are you doing?"* or *"Hi, nice day, isn't it?"* or any friendly "small talk."

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* and rather than focusing on your burn injury.

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S-T-E-P-S
to
Social Comfort & Confidence

STEPS is a simple and effective "tool" for anyone affected by a burn injury. When meeting strangers, entering new social, work or school situations or going into public places, we can influence how people respond to us. By using **STEPS** every day, we project confidence and send the message to others that we are self-assured. It takes practice until it becomes authentic, natural, and part of your daily life. Try practicing in front of a mirror.

1. **Self-Talk —** what we say to ourselves and believe
   I love and accept myself the way I am and the way I am not.
   I meet people easily and feel comfortable with them.
   I Can Do It!

2. **Tone of Voice**
   Friendly
   Warm
   Enthusiastic

3. **Eye Contact**
   LOOK people in the eye—even if only for 3-4 seconds.

4. **Posture**
   Head raised
   Rib cage lifted
   Shoulders back

5. **Smile**
   Confident
   Approachable

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 total control over the image you choose for your audience to view.

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Phoenix Society for burn survivors

Contact us for more information: 1835 R W Berends Dr. SW, Grand Rapids, MI 49519-4955
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Rehearse Your Responses

The " Tool" for Answering Questions

Rehearse Your Responses is a helpful "TOOL" to use when people ask questions about you or your loved one. People with burns and their family members often report feeling awkward, angry, or embarrassed when strangers ask questions about their burns and injury. **RYR** is the "TOOL" to use.

Writing and memorizing a 3-sentence response to unexpected questions is a "TOOL" that increases your social comfort and confidence. By using RYR you can gain control of social situations and respond calmly to questions with courtesy, kindness, and warmth. Practicing the **RYR** "TOOL" in front of a mirror also helps you increase poise and confidence.

Example:
"I was burned in an auto crash. I'm doing a lot better now. Thanks for asking." or "Thanks for your concern."

The response of *"Thanks for asking." or "Thanks for your concern"* *closes* the conversation.

If the person requests more information and you choose not to continue talking or don't want to provide details, politely respond with, **"That's all I care to discuss today; I'm sure you understand."** Smile warmly at the person and walk away.

Practice your RYR in front of mirror.

Be sure to use your **STEPS…**

Self-Talk—"I can handle this easily and confidently,"
Speak in a friendly ***Tone of voice***
Look 'em in the ***Eye***
Posture-Stand up straight
Give people a warm, confident ***Smile***.

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Rehearse Your Responses

The " Tool" for Answering Questions

Write Your Own 3-Sentence "TOOL"

1. **First sentence states:** ***How you were burned or when you were burned.***
   Example: *"I was burned in a house fire."* OR *"I was burned a few months ago."*

2. **Second sentence states:** ***How you are doing now.***
   Example: *"I'm getting better all the time and still having surgeries."* OR *"I'm doing better now."*

3. **Third sentence states:** ***Ending the conversation.***
   Example: *"Thanks for your concern."* OR *"Thanks for asking."*

On a day you have low energy or just don't feel up to questions:
Example: "I had a burn injury. I don't care to discuss it." Smile and walk on.

Remember: If a person requests more information and you choose not to talk more; politely respond with, ***"That's all I care to discuss today; I'm sure you understand."*** Smile warmly and walk away.

Practice your RYR in front of mirror.

Be sure to use your **STEPS**

Self-Talk—"I can handle this easily and confidently,"
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It Starts With YOU!

Introducing Behavioral "TOOLS" to Patients and Families

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.

INTRODUCING THE INITIAL **"YOU'LL BE GOING HOME SOON"** CONVERSATION

Example:

"Mr. Brown, you know in a few days you'll 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. 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 will 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 so it isn't such a challenge. Would it be OK if we discussed them now?"

HOW TO INTRODUCE **THE STARING "TOOL"** TO PATIENTS AND FAMILIES

Example:

"Mrs. Jones, 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?"

HOW TO INTRODUCE **THE RYR "TOOL"** TO PATIENTS AND FAMILIES

Example:

"Mr. 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 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. I want to give you a

"TOOL" to help you with questions called Rehearse Your Responses or RYR. 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?"

HOW TO INTRODUCE **THE STEPS "TOOL"** TO PATIENTS AND FAMILIES

Example:

"Bob, when people leave the burn center and begin going out in the community, sometimes they feel a little uncomfortable at first because all of the attention from people. 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. I'd like to go over the STEPS "TOOL" now if that's ok?"

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