Facing Disability.com Provides Online SCI Peer Counseling



Objective: Facing Disability.com is an innovative website specifically created to connect families who suddenly have to cope with a spinal cord injury (SCI) with the life experiences of other people like them. It contains 1,500 videos of family members answering real-life questions about how they cope, as well as interviews with SCI experts. It also has a unique Peer Counseling section that offers one-to-one conversations online.

Design/Method: Peer counselors are screened for prior training and experience. They are matched to counseling requests by relationship to injury (person with SCI or family member), age at injury, gender of injured person, level of injury and "questions and issues you'd like to discuss." They communicate through private mailboxes on the website. Each new email triggers an alert that a message is waiting. Both sides are anonymous; the service is free.

Results: Analysis of 80 peer counseling match-ups over a two-year period (June, 2013-June, 2015) revealed that almost 60% of requests came from people with SCI, and 40% from family members. Half of the family members were spouses/partners; the other 50% parents, children and siblings. Of individuals with SCI, 65% had paraplegia, 35%, tetraplegia. Most important topics for people with SCI were social life, family relationships, pain, depression, bowel and bladder and acceptance of disability. For family members, topics were relationships, caregiving, sex, motivation and encouragement. About half (48%) of the counseling relationships lasted one month, with 52% ranging from 2-9 months. In a follow-up email survey, 75% of respondents rated their peer counseling experience "Extremely" or "Very Valuable," and 70% said they were "Extremely Likely" to recommend it to a friend or relative.

Conclusion: Online peer counseling can provide valuable support for people with SCI and their families.

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Peer Counseling Analysis:

June 2013-June 2015

(80 match-ups over a two-year period)

Who initiated the request for peer counseling?

60% 40%

eople Family vith SCI memb

Which family members made the request?

50% 50% Spouses/ Parents, ch

dren, siblings

Level of injury of individuals with SCI:

65% 35% arapleaia Tetrapleaia

Approximate length of counseling relationships:

48% 52%

1 month 2-9 months

Peer Counseling Sample Email Communications

Welcome Email:



Welcome To the Facing Disability Peer Counseling Program

ank you for signing up for peer counseling.

We will soon match you with a peer counselor who has had similar experience in dealing with the questions and issues you'd like to dis

off:

Click here to sign in and read your first message

Sign in with your email, counseleefd@gmail.com, and password to learn more about peer counseling

If you've forgotten your password: Click here to reset your password

anks again, e Facing Disability Tear

Match-up and Tips:



You've Been Matched with a Counselee in the Facing Disability Peer Counseling Program

We appreciate that you have volunteered to use your knowledge a experience to give practical help and support to people with the sp cord injuries and their families.

You start the conversation by writing the first message.
Sign in with your email pcfacingdisability@gmail.com:

Sign in with your email <u>pcfacingdisability@gmail.com</u>: Click here to sign in and write the first message to your counsel

If you've forgotten your password: Click here to reset your password

Tips for starting the conversation:

Begin by writing about the spinal cord injury in your family.

Once you save your message, your counselee will automatically

 When your counselee responds, you'll get an email letting you k that you have a message waiting.

Thanks again,
The Facing Disability Team

Message Notification:



Your Peer Counselor Has Left You a Message

You have a peer counseling message waitin for you on the Facing Disability site.

Sign in with your email counseleefd@gmail.com, and respond to your peer counselor's message now:

Click here to sign in and respond

f you've forgotten your password: Click here to reset your password

Tips on how to respond:

 Keep your messages short, no more than five to six paragraphs per message.

Try to focus on one topic in each message; write about

the issue that is giving you the most trouble right now.

Be specific. Details will help your counselor understand

your situation more clearly and will be more helpful.

• Ask questions like: "What worked for you?" "What helped

you the most?" "What are the best resources?

The Facing Disability Team