HELPING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COPE AFTER A PARENT’S BRAIN INJURY

WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

24 JUNE 2026

UNIVERSITY OF
SURREY

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Worshop Organisers:

Dr Hannah Frith, University of Surrey

Dr Freddie Byrne, Living with ABI

Dr Sara Da Silva Ramos, Brainkind

Professor Charlie Whiffin, University of Derby

Administrative support:

Charlotte Cheatle, University of Surrey

Louise Jones, Institute of Advanced Studies, University of Surrey

INTRODUCTION

This workshop aims to provide an up-to-date discussion of the impact of parental brain injury on children and young people and identify emerging best practices to support them.

Globally, acquired brain injury (ABI) is a leading cause of disability, and is the leading cause of death and disability for people aged under 40 in the UK. ABI significantly impacts the injured person but also alters the lives of family members – including children and young people. While the impact of ABI on adult family members is well-recognised, the impact on young people is often overlooked. The focus of services, professionals and non-injured family members is, not unreasonably, on the injured parent. Children and young people are left feeling stressed and worried, lacking information, and grieving the loss of the parent they knew before the injury. Evidence on the longer-term impact on young people is emerging and indicates that they experience higher incidence of mental health difficulties, worse school performance and poorer social relationships than their peers, signalling an urgent need for early intervention.

This workshop brings together experts working across disciplines (psychology, nursing, social work, allied heath), with community organisations supporting families affected by ABI, to discuss how the challenges of developing and delivering evidence-based interventions to support children and young people affected by parental brain injury can be overcome.

PROGRAMME

WEDNESDAY 24 JUNE
INNOVATION FOR HEALTH BUILDING, ROOM 02 IFH 01

(BST)	
09.30 - 10.00	Coffee and Arrival
10.00 - 10.10	**Welcome and Introductions**
10.10 - 10.50	**Long-Term Consequences and Needs of Children and Young People who Experience Parental Brain Injury** Dr Mia Moth Wolffbrandt, Neurorehabilitation Research and Knowledge Centre, Rigshospitalet, Denmark
10.50 - 11.30	**Discussion: What are the current challenges to/opportunities for supporting children and young people in your context?**
11.30 - 11.40	Break
11.40 - 12.00	**Supporting Parents and Children to Maintain Family Bonds After Parental Brain Injury** Dr Caitriona Hughes, Brainkind [presenting remotely]
12.00 - 12.20	**“A Book is a Gateway” – Reading can Improve Parent-Child Communication Following Parental ABI** Rachel Atkinson, Homerton Healthcare
12.20 - 12.40	**Breaking Barriers Through Creativity: The Silverlining Brain Injury Charity & The Woodland Friends** Laween Saadi & Sharon West, The Silverlining Brain Injury Charity
12.40 - 13.10	Lunch

13.10 - 13.30	**Working with Families When a Parent Has a Brain Injury: A Child Psychology Perspective** Dr Fiona Jeffries and Dr Megan Hofmann, Recolo
13.30 - 14.10	**A Systemic Rucksack: Tools for Therapeutic Support of Children and Young People Affected by Parental and Sibling Acquired Brain Injury** Dr Freddie Byrne & Dr Jocelyne Kenny, Living with ABI Ltd
14.10 - 14.45	**Discussion: What are the priorities in meeting the challenges of supporting children and young people in your context?**
14.45 - 15.00	Break
15.00 - 15.40	**Developing a Digital Resource for Supporting Children and Young People when a Family Member has a Brain Injury: A Co-Design Approach** Dr Kate Dawes, South Australian Brain Injury Rehabilitation Service, Australia [presenting remotely]

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

RACHEL ATKINSON

Rachel Atkinson is a Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist with over 15 years' experience working in neurorehabilitation. For the last 8 years she has worked in the RNRU Outreach Service at Homerton Healthcare providing interdisciplinary specialist ABI rehab to North East London, including supporting brain injury survivors, their families and their dependent children. She is a mum to two primary-school age kids.

DR FREDDIE BYRNE

Freddie is a clinical psychologist and supervisor with a special interest in supporting brain injury survivors and their families, including where there are issues of clinical complexity and risk. Freddie has completed further training in family therapy and is passionate about applying this knowledge to supporting families living with acquired brain injury. In 2019 he travelled to Melbourne to work with the internationally recognised Bouverie Centre to train in their "single session" model of narrative therapy for families living with ABI. Freddie is known for his consistent and respectful approach to engaging individuals, families, and staff teams. He is experienced in providing clinical leadership, working within a family sensitive approach to neuro rehabilitation.

DR KATE DAWES

Kate is the Principal Social Worker in the South Australian Brain Injury Rehabilitation Service, with over 16 years of clinical experience in acquired brain injury rehabilitation. She completed her PhD in 2026, which focused on children's lived experiences of parental brain injury. Specifically, exploring the challenges children face when family roles and dynamics change, and the types of support that can best promote resilience and wellbeing through co-designed solutions. Her research seeks to inform responsive services and interventions that recognise children not only as bystanders but as active participants in family recovery, while embedding knowledge translation for clinicians across acute, sub-acute, and ambulatory settings. Kate has published in leading rehabilitation journals, and has expertise in qualitative, mixed methods, and participatory action research methodologies.

DR MEGAN HOFMANN

Megan is an experienced Clinical Psychologist who specialises in working with children, young people and families who are dealing with the challenges of chronic health conditions, disability and neurodevelopmental differences. Megan has over 12 years' experience working within paediatric psychology services and currently works for Recolo, providing specialist psychological assessment and intervention for children and families within paediatric neurorehabilitation. She has a particular interest in family adjustment following brain injury.
As well as her Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, Megan has completed further training in EMDR, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT).

DR CAITRIONA HUGHES

Fiona is an experienced Clinical Psychologist who specialises in working with children and families who are dealing with the challenges of medical illness or disability. Fiona has extensive experience of working with children with acquired and traumatic brain injuries. She is Deputy Clinical Lead at Recolo, providing specialist clinical supervision and supporting service development, research and audit in the field of paediatric neurorehabilitation. As well as her Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, Fiona has also completed further training in Narrative Therapy, Family Therapy & Systemic Practice. Fiona holds Honorary Lecturer and Tutor posts at University College London.

DR JOCELYNE KENNY

Jocelyne has 12 years' experience as a Clinical Psychologist in the NHS, including the past 8 years in specialist Neuropsychology and ABI services. Alongside her NHS role, she has developed a private practice, applying her expertise in both settings. In recent years, Jocelyne has focused on supporting brain injury survivors and their families, with a particular interest in couples following ABI. To enhance this work, she completed additional training as a Systemic & Family Psychotherapist and established a family and couple therapy clinic within her local NHS Neuropsychology service. Jocelyne is Chair of a national special interest group for psychologists working with families following ABI. She is involved in NIHR-funded research projects and lectures trainee clinical psychologists and neuropsychologists on Systemic Approaches to Neuropsychology.

LAWEEN SAADI

I joined The Silverlining Brain Injury Charity in 2017 as a Silverliner, and I was employed by the Charity in January 2022. I am the Link Worker and Rehabilitation Assistant at the Charity, and I love my job as no two days are the same. The Link Worker role includes attending professional conferences and visiting solicitors, case management companies, and neurorehabilitation hospitals, to provide information about the Charity and the benefits of free membership. The Rehabilitation Assistant role includes supporting our members (Silverliners) onboard to access all available support and join our groups. I also work / have worked with external organisations including ABIL (Acquired Brain Injury forum for London), City St George's, University of London, and BABICM (British Association of Brain Injury & Complex Case Management).

CATHRYN TAYLOR

Cathryn acquired a traumatic brain injury almost five years ago following a serious accident. Since then, she has navigated a complex rehabilitation journey, including multiple surgeries, while continuing to adapt to the challenges of family life as a wife and mother. Alongside her rehabilitation, Cathryn has become a passionate advocate for people affected by brain injury. She works closely with Headway and regularly contributes as a brain injury speaker from lived experience, sharing her insights with professionals, service providers and others affected by brain injury. Drawing on her lived experience of parenting after brain injury, Cathryn is committed to raising awareness of the impact that brain injury can have on the whole family, particularly children. She hopes that by sharing her story, she can help improve understanding and support for other families facing similar challenges.

SHARON WEST

Joining The Silverlining Brain Injury Charity in 2025, Sharon is the charity's University Coordinator & Transition Officer. Sharon is working on developing and expanding partnerships with universities, where Silverliners serve as Experts by Experience, educating healthcare and social science students with a focus on improving understanding and care provided within healthcare services. She is also working directly with child brain injury services, including the Child Brain Injury Trust (CBIT), bridging the gap to adult services, giving hope and purpose to young brain injury survivors and their families.

DR MIA MOTH WOLFFBRANDT

Mia Moth Wolffbrandt, PhD, is a research nurse at the Neurorehabilitation Research and Knowledge Centre at Copenhagen University Hospital – Rigshospitalet, bringing more than 20 years of clinical experience in neurorehabilitation to her work. Her research is rooted in a clinical interest in how acquired brain injury affects the entire family, including children and young people. Her PhD focused on the long-term consequences and needs of children and young people who have a parent or sibling with acquired brain injury or spinal cord injury.

ABSTRACTS

Long-Term Consequences and Needs of Children and Young People who Experience Parental Brain Injury

Mia Moth Wolffbrandt, Neurorehabilitation Research and Knowledge Centre, Rigshospitalet, Denmark

When a parent has an acquired brain injury, children are often profoundly affected across several aspects of their everyday lives. Drawing on recent research, this presentation provides insights into the long-term consequences and needs of children and young people affected by parental brain injury. Specifically, the presentation will include findings from two register-based studies examining socioeconomic outcomes and health care utilisation, as well as insights from a qualitative study exploring the needs of children and young people. Finally, the presentation will consider ways to strengthen support for this group across healthcare and community settings.

Supporting Parents and Children to Maintain Family Bonds After Parental Brain Injury

Caitriona Hughes, Brainkind

Supporting parents with a brain injury and their children to maintain bonds after a parent has acquired a brain injury is a frequently overlooked area in the practice of neuropsychology in the United Kingdom. It should, in my view however, form an important part of holistic care throughout the patient journey following an acquired brain injury. In the future, I hope to see this ethos of supporting families form a routine part of ABI care from the acute hospital setting through to the longer term, irrespective of whether the person returns to their own home, lives in residential care, or in supported living. My presentation will seek to present some of the practical initiatives I have taken in clinical practice over the years to try and support parents with a brain injury and their children in both the NHS and within Brainkind, a third sector provider of neurorehabilitation services. My presentation will seek to also address some of the challenges I encountered, potential barriers staff may feel around supporting families, and how I sought to overcome these.

“A Book is a Gateway” – Reading can Improve Parent-Child Communication Following Parental ABI

Rachel Atkinson, Homerton Healthcare

Brain injuries affect the whole family. Reading with children is a common shared communication activity providing a natural ramp for interactive communication. This case reflection discusses strategy-based interventions for three clients with Cognitive Communication Disorder following Acquired Brain Injury, aimed at improving their abilities to share reading with their primary age children. We adopted a strategy training approach using prompts for priming, repetition, discussion and summarising. Individualised functional strategies were explored. For a third patient we supported access to story-sharing via development of a video. Clients self-rated ability to follow and understand stories when reading with their children. Following strategy-training and adoption, clients’ self-rating of their ability to follow a story improved on average (n=2) from 2/10 to 8/10. Client use of written prompts was dependent on attention switching and short term memory skills. Clients reported increased confidence and enjoyment in reading with their children, and feeling more positive about their parental role. The inherent properties of family reading make it a natural means of enhancing interactive communication between parents with CCD and their children, when supported by functional strategies. Experiencing success improved clients’ confidence as parents, and increased children’s opportunities for positive communication experiences. Recommended changes to future practice are discussed. These include a children’s rating scale for reading pleasure and more detailed outcome measures. Exploring the more general therapeutic impact at the impairment level in terms of reading ability and social communication skills is considered.

Breaking Barriers Through Creativity: The Silverlining Brain Injury Charity & The Woodland Friends

Laween Saadi & Sharon West, The Silverlining Brain Injury Charity

Children often struggle to understand the changes that occur when a parent/family member experience a brain injury. Cognitive, emotional, behavioural, social, and physical symptoms can be confusing for young people, sometimes leading to anxiety, misunderstanding, and feelings of isolation. The Silverlining Brain Injury Charity would like to introduce a unique educational resource: a children’s book created by adult brain injury survivors (“Silverliners”) to help children better understand brain injury while fostering empathy, resilience, and kindness. Each character in the book is a Silverliner, represented as a gentle Woodland Friend animal. The book illustrates some of the many consequences of brain injury while also highlighting practical strategies that support coping, understanding, and self-belief. The story communicates the message that challenges can be faced with compassion, patience, and the power of believing in oneself and others. The project is the result of a creative collaboration among multiple Silverlining groups. The Creative Writing Group shaped the narrative through seasonal storytelling; the Art Group created the illustrations; the Photography Group contributed visual; and the Healthy Relationships Group embedded messages of encouragement and resilience. The project continues to grow, with the Music Group developing an accompanying song and Drama Group bringing the story to life through performance. The development of the book as a survivor-led creative initiative aims to overcome barriers for professionals/family members in supporting children and young people and has value as an educational tool for schools and families affected by brain injury. Our charity's goal this year is to distribute 3,000 copies to schools across the UK to promote brain injury awareness, kindness, and understanding from a young age.

Working with Families When a Parent Has a Brain Injury: A Child Psychology Perspective

Dr Fiona Jeffries and Dr Megan Hofmann, Recolo

We are clinical psychologists, working predominantly with children and families in the field of paediatric neurorehabilitation. As part of this work, we support children and families when a parent has a brain injury. This presentation will cover some of the themes that come up in this work:

1. Impact of the Parent's Brain Injury on the Child-Parent Relationship and Wider Family Dynamics
2. Impact of the Parent's Brain Injury on the Practical Aspects of Parenting
3. Supporting the Child's Emotional Wellbeing, Adjustment and Development
4. Facilitating Family Communication and Shared Understanding
5. Safeguarding and Risk Management
6. Advocacy and Systems-Level Support, Including Working With the Child's School and with Adult Neuropsychology Colleagues.

The presentation will include the perspective of a parent with lived experience of brain injury and parenting.

A Systemic Rucksack: Tools for Therapeutic Support of Children and Young People Affected by Parental and Sibling Acquired Brain Injury

Dr Freddie Byrne & Dr Jocelyne Kenny, Living with ABI Ltd

Dr Freddie Byrne, Clinical Psychologist and Clinical Director of Living with ABI Limited, and Dr Jocelyn Kenny, Associate Professor, Clinical Psychologist and Family Therapist, will draw on their combined decades of experience supporting families following acquired brain injury. Inspired by Karen Partridge's 'systemic rucksack' developed with Camden children's social care—a practical, portable collection of tools designed to embed systemic ideas into everyday practice—they present their own adaptable toolkit for therapeutic work. Informed by systemic and narrative approaches, they will explore practical tools such as the family life cycle, bringing playfulness to serious situations, timelines, maping narratives of continuity and discontinuity, co-authoring and re-authoring stories of self and family, genograms, and eco-maps. Attendees will leave with a ready-to-use set of flexible techniques they can carry into their own practice with these children and families.

Developing a Digital Resource for Supporting Children and Young People when a Family Member has a Brain Injury: A Co-Design Approach

Dr Kate Dawes, South Australian Brain Injury Rehabilitation Service, Australia [presenting remotely]

Brain Connect emerged from a five-study program that mapped the hidden impacts of parental acquired brain injury (ABI) on children, families, and the clinicians who support them. Across these studies, findings identified that children often experience confusion, fear, and secondary trauma; partners carry overwhelming cognitive-emotional load; and clinicians feel under-resourced to explain ABI in age-appropriate ways. The work documented inconsistent communication across services, gaps in family-centred education, and a lack of practical tools to help adults respond to children's needs. Co-design with children, adult family members, survivors and clinicians confirmed the need for a shared language, age-appropriate neuroeducation explanations, and multimedia resources that can be integrated into routine care. Together, these studies shaped Brain Connect as a scalable, trauma-informed platform that strengthens family understanding, supports children's adjustment, and equips clinicians with ready-to-use guidance.

POSTER: ***A Toolkit to Support Adoption of Patient-Engaged Learning Across Medical Education***

Sharon West, The Silverlining Brain Injury Charity

Parental brain injury can have profound and enduring effects on children and young people, who are often an overlooked population within clinical and support pathways. They may experience emotional distress, role changes within the family, disrupted education, and increased risk to their long-term mental health and wellbeing. Addressing these challenges requires not only early intervention, but also a healthcare workforce equipped with empathy, insight, and an understanding of lived experience. The Tool Kit poster presents a collaborative initiative between The Silverlining Brain Injury Charity and Aston Medical School, developed over five years through the Experts By Experience and Pathway to Healthcare programmes. Central to this partnership is the integration of lived experience into medical education, where individuals affected by brain injury ("Silverliners") contribute directly to student learning. This approach enriches traditional curricula by moving beyond clinical theory. Building on prior peer-reviewed research, this collaboration has led to the development of a practical, evidence-informed Toolkit designed to support the wider adoption of patient-engaged learning in early medical education. The Toolkit provides guidance, resources, and adaptable frameworks for educators seeking to embed lived experience meaningfully within teaching.

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