

Brain Injury Recovery Kit

Rainbow's Lead Speech Language Pathologist Angie McCalla and a client tested The Brain Injury Recovery Kit (BIRK). Created by Day-Timer, this kit was designed by Lisa Keller, a person with a brain injury, in conjunction with Sandra J. Knutson, CRC, CDMS, CCM — Lisa's former caseworker. The tool was created to help TBI survivors recover — and in Angie's opinion, those with mild to moderate brain injuries stand to benefit from the BIRK.

The kit is designed to:

- make 'getting through the day' more productive,
- help with memory deficits,
- promote organization,
- reduce stress, and
- support therapy rehabilitation efforts.

The BIRK is an inclusive five-step system that contains two comprehensive workbooks (one for the person with the brain injury and another for the buddy assisting with recovery) and three DVDs. The books provide information, exercises, review forms and checklists that track progress and reinforce the DVD lessons — helping to identify breakdowns in sequencing, recall and initiation. They also provide strategies based on what Day-Timer calls the Four Keys of Recovery – Buddy, Rest, Acceptance and Routine. The strategies stress development of step-by-step protocols and routine. The planner system allows the user to track information in one location and uses color-coding for organizing and prioritizing tasks. The five-step system consists of:

- Step One: Learning about brain injury and its complications, emphasizing the importance of professional therapeutic care and survivor challenges.
- Step Two: Learning how to support an individual with brain injury — with an introduction to the workbooks, Four Keys of recovery and how the buddy should assist.
- Step Three: Understanding the experience of brain injury. The buddy and user begin to progress through the Four Keys of Recovery – buddy, rest, acceptance and routine.
- Step Four: The Day-Timer personal planner and color-coding for success tools are introduced for organization and routine to improve memory, confidence and organization.
- Step Five: Using repetition and reminders. The Electronic Message Center voice recorder is introduced as a reminder system for users. It includes alarms, a countdown timer and multiple mailboxes.



Review Results

Angie and a client went through the system and analyzed its strengths and weaknesses. Overall, both participants had positive results with the BIRK. Based on their observations, they found the kit to be an excellent tool. It incorporates a lot of sensory components allowing users to exercise all of their modalities — they can touch the orange cord and see the planner, read the checklists and watch the DVDs. It provides tools that you create (such as a calendar or schedule), making it very interactive.

"From day one, she [the client] loved it," Angie explained. "We had very positive results. Typically she is very resistive to programming, but this really gave her a sense of, 'I can do this.' It was very empowering and she felt that she could accomplish things on her own with the help of the kit."

The client said she liked that the kit explained brain injury in great detail. "A lot of tools in this kit, if mastered, can make the user more efficient," she explained.

This sense of empowerment and confidence carried over into the client's other therapies and treatments, such as occupational therapy. "She started using a chalkboard wall in her apartment bedroom to become more organized," Angie said. "It was a tool she never utilized before and it has further improved her attitude and organization in other therapies as a result."

Brain Injury Recovery Kit *continued*

Our client had positive results with the following kit components:

- Color-coding: “It takes a lot of strain off of me when I can just look at something and know it is urgent or it has to do with my family, money matters, etc.,” she said.
- Going Somewhere Checklist: if the user focuses on trip details prior to leaving, then he or she is able to focus on driving when on the road.
- Resting Eye Mask: The client found that the resting eye mask helped her to fall asleep even when she was not tired. “When I put this on, it blocks out all light, which quiets my mind and forces me to fall asleep,” she explained.
- Orange Cord (used as a placeholder): The orange cord helps users focus on the task at hand. When they stop and return to a task at a later time, it prompts them to remember exactly where they left off.

Weaknesses were found with several pieces of the kit as well. The client thought the DVDs were too repetitive — over redundancy can cause participants to skim over material and lose attention. The client found that the most important information was presented at the beginning of disc one. “It is recommended that the user and buddy watch all three DVDs from beginning to end before moving forward. But by then, a lot of important information is forgotten,” she discovered.

However, Angie, her therapist, thought the repetition was useful and for many would be necessary. “It’s what the majority of the brain injury population needs. Repetition and routine helps them to pick up things more quickly. The kit really focuses on over learning, and that is something I’ve tried to carryover to my other therapies,” she said. “Often we move on to the next task right after one is mastered, saying, ‘OK, we did this successfully one week, now we can add the next one. But it is beneficial to over learn the material and do it for several weeks before adding the next task.”

The client also found the ID key chain to be unfavorable. “I understand the concept, but it screams, ‘look at me, I have an impairment.’ Therefore, I am not willing to use it.” Angie did not think the key chain was very effective, either. “When an item is that large and does not fit nicely in a purse or bag, some may not be willing to use it.”

While the client liked color-coding, she found the orange binder to be excessive. “Using a planner is something a person should continue to do even after their recovery goals have been accomplished. Why not use something that resembles what others have? If a person always puts the planner in the same place, he or she will not have a problem finding it,” she asserted. “The orange

color isn’t necessary.”

Angie agreed. “The orange binder was just too large. It really shouts, ‘there is something wrong with me.’”

Our client also made suggestions on how to improve the kit. She thought that the overall labeling of the workbooks needed to be improved. Angie explained that the workbooks needed to provide more detail. “The workbooks don’t provide explanation and details — they just tab right to worksheets,” she said. “The kit would benefit from having the workbooks overlap more with the DVD content.”

The client also thought that the workbook should include a more thorough section on brain injury, such as a diagram explaining which deficits can occur in which section of the brain as a result of an injury. She thought the workbook would benefit from having common brain injury definitions, a list of rehabilitation therapies along with a list of therapy occupations and professionals.

How to order a BIRK

Overall, both the Rainbow client and lead SLP therapist had positive results with the BIRK and would recommend it to other individuals with TBI, especially those with mild to moderate injuries.

The BIRK may be purchased at a retail price of \$600 or you can take advantage of a special discount for RainbowVisions Magazine readers. by contacting ...

800.525.5005

www.daytimer.com

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