



## Cognitive and Behavioural Changes and Strategies

After acquired brain injury, a person may have a range of cognitive and behavioural changes that can impact on independent living, study, work, driving, and social and family relationships. It is useful for family, friends, and support workers to have a good understanding of some of the changes that may be present. It is also important to have simple strategies to support the person with acquired brain injury to manage cognitive and behavioural changes.

<b><i>Cognitive or Behavioural change</i></b>	<b><i>Problems</i></b>	<b><i>Strategies</i></b>
<b><i>Memory impairments</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty remembering ongoing events, information, instructions, misplacing objects, forgetting names, details of conversation, forget appointments</li> <li>• Difficulty learning new tasks or information</li> <li>• Difficulty learning new behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use memory aids wherever possible, such as a diary, calendar, notepads, reminders, timers or alarms</li> <li>• Try to make lists and keep them practical and easy to find</li> <li>• Keep information and important items (keys, wallet, address book etc) in the same place</li> <li>• Use prompts and reminders to help memory – checklists, signs, another person</li> <li>• Repeat information, especially instructions or new information</li> </ul>
<b><i>Poor concentration</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced ability to stay with a task for more than brief periods</li> <li>• May get distracted easily</li> <li>• May have difficulty doing more than one task at a time, or completing all the steps in a complex task</li> <li>• Easily off the task or topic of conversation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep to simple tasks</li> <li>• Remove distractions wherever possible e.g. noise, television, people</li> <li>• Plan brief activities which are interesting</li> <li>• Use cues and reminders to bring attention back to the task or topic</li> </ul>

<b><i>Cognitive or Behavioural change</i></b>	<b><i>Problems</i></b>	<b><i>Strategies</i></b>
<b><i>Impaired planning and organisation</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May have difficulty planning ahead for activities</li> <li>• May be disorganised</li> <li>• May not think ahead</li> <li>• May do things before thinking of alternatives or consequences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure and routine will assist in organising daily activities &amp; tasks</li> <li>• Use aids such as a diary, notebook, or lists to help plan activities and, appointments, and to remind about birthdays, social events</li> <li>• Set aside planning time each day</li> <li>• Make sure instructions are simple; break down big tasks into small steps</li> </ul>
<b><i>Slowed responses and information processing</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The person may take longer to take in information, to think about things, make decisions, or to act</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow extra time to process and understand new information or to finish a task</li> <li>• Plan for extra time for activities and tasks and set realistic goals</li> </ul>
<b><i>Poor initiation</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty getting started with a task or activity</li> <li>• May appear to lack motivation or interest</li> <li>• May have difficulty following through once an activity is started at each new step or stage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure and routine will help in getting activities done</li> <li>• Use prompts to start and continue activities</li> <li>• Find a range of activities that are interesting to increase motivation and interest</li> <li>• The assistance of another person may help to get started and keep involved in an activity</li> </ul>
<b><i>Inflexibility in thinking</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inability to generate ideas or thoughts</li> <li>• Difficulty doing or thinking about something from more than one point of view</li> <li>• May have trouble shifting ideas or beliefs</li> <li>• May get “stuck” on ideas, topics, or behaviour</li> <li>• May have difficulty changing their behaviour</li> <li>• May have trouble with comprehension and reasoning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce changes/new ideas ahead of time</li> <li>• Start with very small changes or compromises</li> <li>• Encourage the person to try a different idea or approach</li> <li>• Encourage the person to think about other ideas or options</li> <li>• Make suggestions and discuss options and benefits so they can see the reason for choosing options</li> <li>• Redirect, distract</li> </ul>

<b><i>Cognitive or Behavioural change</i></b>	<b><i>Problems</i></b>	<b><i>Strategies</i></b>
<b><i>Impulsivity and disinhibition</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The person may act on impulse, before thinking through an idea or action</li> <li>• May not think about the consequences of what they say or do</li> <li>• Says things without thinking – may seem rude or abrupt</li> <li>• May express ideas or needs in inappropriate way, with inappropriate person or in the wrong situation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage the person to think before acting</li> <li>• Provide immediate feedback about behaviour, and consequences</li> <li>• Give suggestions about alternative behaviour</li> <li>• Encourage awareness of social rules and expectations</li> <li>• Provide cues and reminders re social rules and expectations</li> </ul>
<b><i>Lack of awareness or insight about changes as the result of brain injury</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The person may be unaware of his/her problems</li> <li>• They may lack awareness of the consequences of their disability for work, driving, living relationships</li> <li>• Poor awareness of how they relate to others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't argue with the person</li> <li>• Provide information about tasks and activities e.g. why they should do tasks</li> <li>• Provide specific feedback and information to the person</li> <li>• Accept that adjustment takes time following injury</li> </ul>
<b><i>Emotional Lability</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty controlling emotions e.g. inappropriate crying or laughter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to ignore the behaviour</li> <li>• Try to identify triggers in the person's activities and environment and avoid these where possible</li> <li>• Watch for factors such as over-stimulation, stress, and fatigue which can increase likelihood of the behaviour occurring</li> <li>• Encourage the person to use strategies such as distraction to shorten the episode of lability</li> </ul>
<b><i>Egocentricity</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The person may be focussed on themselves and their own needs, feelings etc.</li> <li>• May have difficulty with empathy for others</li> <li>• May be impatient and want things done immediately</li> <li>• Can be demanding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide the person with clear, direct feedback about others needs and feelings</li> <li>• Set very clear limits about what can be done by you and when</li> <li>• Encourage the person to think about how others might feel</li> <li>• Don't take the behaviour personally</li> </ul>

<b>Cognitive or Behavioural change</b>	<b>Problems</b>	<b>Strategies</b>
<b>Increased or decreased sexual interest or behaviour</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The person may express their sexual needs and interests in an inappropriate manner or time, or with an inappropriate person</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide very clear feedback about what is appropriate/acceptable behaviour in specific situations</li> <li>Don't give ambiguous or mixed messages or feedback – don't laugh or join in inappropriate conversation, or encourage unwanted behaviour</li> <li>Direct the person to other topics or conversation</li> <li>Discuss alternatives with the person</li> <li>Try not to be judgemental</li> </ul>
<b>Irritability and temper control</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A person may be more irritable, or likely to have quick temper outbursts</li> <li>They may have less control of frustration levels and temper</li> <li>Can be verbal aggression or physical aggression towards themselves or others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ignore behaviour as much as possible, or leave the situation</li> <li>Provide clear direct feedback about what is appropriate</li> <li>Enlist the support and help of other people in dealing with the problem e.g. family, friends, professionals</li> <li>Look at triggers or causes in the person's environment, daily life</li> <li>Remove the person from anger provoking situations, or avoid them where possible</li> <li>Remain calm and model the behaviour you expect from them</li> <li>Discuss alternative ways of managing irritability and temper</li> </ul>
<b>Depression</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Depression can emerge as the person gains awareness of their disability and deals with significant losses and grief</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide support and encouragement</li> <li>Ensure the person is well supported by others e.g. family, friends, church etc and they know that support is needed</li> <li>Link to professionals for specialist help e.g. GP, psychiatrist, psychologist</li> </ul>

<b><i>Cognitive or Behavioural change</i></b>	<b><i>Problems</i></b>	<b><i>Strategies</i></b>
<b><i>Dependency and isolation</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over time, they may have more difficulty with social isolation, loneliness and social relationships with others</li> <li>• They may experience loss of leisure, social and work activities and come to rely on a few people, usually family or close friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage the person's contact with a wide range of other people</li> <li>• Help the person with building relationships with other people</li> <li>• Encourage involvement in community and leisure interests and activities</li> <li>• Where possible assist the person to join new activities or groups</li> <li>• Encourage the person to try new ideas or activities</li> <li>• Plan for their independence and competence with tasks and activities</li> </ul>