

FACT SHEET:



ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

Category:
Behaviour

Audience:
Professional

For more information contact
the Acquired Brain Injury
Outreach Service (ABIOS)

PH: (07) 3406 2311

Email: abios@health.qld.gov.au

Address: PO Box 6053, Buranda 4102

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ABIOS Neuropsychologist

How do I Respond to Angry Behaviour?

Introduction

Anger and aggression is common behaviour of concern that results directly from an acquired brain injury. Specific difficulties can include increased irritability, lower tolerance for frustration, short temper, verbal or physical outbursts or violence, abusive language (swearing) or threatening behaviour. Physical self-harm or harm to other people and property can also happen.

Responding to angry behaviour from others:

Empathy

- Try to understand the other person's point of view – be empathic and interested
- Try to understand the cause of the anger – what is it that has made the person upset?
- Most people are angry for a reason – it could be lack of understanding, frustration, or social isolation.
- Often people are angry because their needs are not being met in some way.
- Get to know the person and let them get to know you
- Be positive when you can - "I enjoyed talking to you", "How are you going?" and "Thanks" are all allowed.
- Courteous behaviour should be routine.

Stay Calm

- Stay calm and speak softly - this will be less threatening
- Breathe slowly
- Use a calm voice
- Keep an appropriate distance
- Make sure your face and body are giving calm messages
- Manage your own emotions – if you sound or look irritable, this will escalate anger and arguments
- Smile and be welcoming

It takes two to argue

- Don't argue or try to reason with someone who is yelling or angry
- Try not to lose your temper or seem impatient
- Let the person know that you can't help them if they are angry or yelling at you

Acknowledge the Person

- You can acknowledge the emotion or point of view – it is important for the person to know you are listening and trying to help
- “You seem upset”
- “How can I help you”
- You don't have to agree with the person but you can say “I can see why you would feel that way”.
- Don't avoid the person in the hope they will go away – deal with their request quickly and directly

Respect

- Remain respectful and courteous at all times, no matter what the provocation
- Use the person's name when you speak to them – this gets their attention
- Don't swear or use abusive language
- Don't ignore the person

Triggers

- Avoid escalating or triggering anger
- Triggers can be internal factors (thoughts, feelings, emotions, physical things like fatigue or pain) or external (the environment, people, certain topics, complaints, poor communication, arguing).
- Try to avoid talking about complaints or sore points, criticizing, using an angry voice or ignoring the person.

Communication

- Make sure your communication is clear – listen, paraphrase, clarify, gather information, use open-ended questions
 - “What you are saying is...”
(Paraphrase)
 - “Tell me more about that”
(Information seeking)
 - “What do you think?”
(Open ended question)

- Be firm and clear – say what you mean
- Be confident and assertive
- Repeat information – use the “broken record” technique
- Increase your confidence by practicing

Be a Problem Solver

- Problem-solve where you can – seek to find a common ground e.g.
- “How can I help you with that?” “What can we do about that?”
- “What do you think should happen?”
- Don't feel like you have to solve every problem or have all the answers “I don't know about that” is ok too.

Boundaries

- Be consistent with what you can/can't do
- “This is how I can help you ...”
- “I can't help you with that”
- “You need to talk to ... about that”
- “I don't have the answer to that question”
- Work as a team – talk and cooperate

Disengage and Divert

- Disengage as quickly as possible – “I need to think about that” or “Let me get back to you about ...” or “I will ask ... to ring you”
- “I don't have the answer right now”
- Change the topic where you can – divert the person's attention to something else.

Extreme Anger

- Consider safety strategies for severe and repeated aggressive behaviour
- Have clear organization policies and procedures about how you respond, and how to contact other people for help
- Limit face to face contact
- Limit phone calls
- Ask the person to leave – politely
- Call the police if necessary



Manage stress

- Don't take the behaviour personally – the person may not be able to change their behaviour because of the brain injury
- Increasing your skills will give you more confidence
- Talk about your own stressors or worries with someone you trust, but respect confidentiality
- Do some breathing and simple relaxation – before, during and after work so that you are prepared for any stressful situations



Notes:

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Resources

See other Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service (ABIOS) Information sheets at <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/abios/>

Quick Relaxation Tip

Stop what you are doing

Sit down

Close your eyes

Breathe in slowly and deeply counting to four

Breathe out slowly, counting to four

Do this several more times

As you breathe in and out, say to your self “relax”

When you feel more relaxed open your eyes