

FACT SHEET:



ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

Category:
Mental Health

Audience:

**Person with an ABI;
Family and Support
Workers; and
Professionals**

**For more information
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ABIOS Neuropsychologist**

Adjustment, Grief and Loss

Adjustment is the ability to adapt to change. When we choose to change something about ourselves or our life, the adjustments that we make are usually viewed in a positive light. However, changes that are forced upon us are more difficult to adjust to, as there is a sense of a loss of control.

Following an acquired brain injury (ABI) people may experience many changes or losses of previous abilities. A person may experience changes in their personality, changes in physical, emotional, behavioural, or cognitive function. This can impact on a person's, roles and responsibilities, performance of everyday tasks, and on their identity. For example, a person who has always been independent and driven their own car may now need to use public transport or rely on others to drive them. A person who has always seen themselves as a 'breadwinner' or 'parent' may struggle to perform this role to the level they were before.

Those close to the person with an ABI may also experience loss and find themselves having to adjust to changes. For example, they may experience a loss of a friend, a loss of independence and freedom, a loss of intimacy or a loss of financial stability.

Adjustment to loss generally involves a grieving process. There is often a gap between how things are after an injury and how things were before the injury (and what we'd like back). This gap results in pain. There are many emotions involved in the adjustment and grieving process. These can include shock, disbelief, denial, anger, resentment, guilt, despair, hopelessness, depression, sadness and acceptance. Not everyone will experience all of these emotions nor do they occur in any predictable way. Grieving is an individual and mostly private experience, and at times may seem very lonely. Sometime others do not acknowledge the loss. They may say things like "you are lucky to be alive". Sometimes these types of comments make the person experiencing loss feel more alone and guilty for feeling sad about their experience.



Strategies for managing loss and adjustment:

- Allow yourself time to grieve and adjust to what has happened.
- Talk to someone that you trust (family, friend, psychologist) about your thoughts and feelings.
- Write a story or journal about your experience to help you process what has happened.
- Look after yourself. Make sure that you are meeting your basic needs. Eat regular meals, get enough sleep, exercise daily, take medication as prescribed.
- Stay connected with your social supports and interests as much as possible.
- Problem solve ways to do things that are important for you in a modified way. For example, if you value spending time with your child but can no longer participate in physical activities, consider other ways to spend time with them. For example, you could play a board game, read, music, watch sport etc.
- Seek support from organisations that specialise in acquired brain injury.

For further information:

For further information on adjustment, grief and loss go to:

- http://www.abistafftraining.info/Content/2_Key_j.html
- https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/grief-and-loss?&gclid=EAlaIqobChMlk4GeleO61QIVyAggCh1F5ATPEAMYASAAEgKpVfD_BwE

Resources

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

Strategies for families, friends and carers helping others loss and adjustment:

- Normalise feelings of grief. For example, "It seems natural to feel sad about being unable to drive".
- Allow for individual differences.
- Allow time for the person to grieve.
- Listen and reflect what the person is saying to you. Try not to project your own feelings onto them.
- There is often no need to offer advice or find a solution. Feeling understood and connected with another person is enough.
- Avoid platitudes like "You're lucky to be alive" and "I know how you feel".
- Don't feel bad about expressing your own needs. The more clearly you can define them the better you can work out ways to fulfil them.
- Look after yourself so that you can better support the person with an ABI.
- Seek support from organisations that specialise in acquired brain injury.

