

# FACT SHEET:



# ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

## Category:

Support for families

## Audience:

Family and  
Support Workers

For more information  
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ABIOS Social Worker

## My Sibling has an ABI

### Introduction

Brain injury affects not only the individual but the family as a whole. It is possible that while family members are occupied with the initial medical crisis and then the rehabilitation and care of a person with an ABI, a sibling can be overlooked.



Siblings themselves may not wish to further burden their parents and may 'put on a brave face'.

Not noticing how a sibling is reacting may miss the opportunity to talk through fears and concerns and facilitate adjustment to the new situation which will likely impact them, their family and their friends for the remainder of their lives.

### Possible Reactions

Emotions commonly experienced include:

- Shock and denial – finding it hard to comprehend and accept the reality of such a tragedy occurring to a family member.
- Anger – that life has been disrupted in this way - "Why us? Why our family? Why not me? What did we do to deserve this?"
- Loss - of the previous relationship with the sibling.
- Guilt – at feeling differently about a sibling who has now changed in personality or for thinking 'I'm glad it wasn't me'.
- Frustration – at being unable to change what has happened or to be of more help.
- Loneliness and isolation - feeling left out of discussions, feeling that parents and other family members are focusing their attention on the sibling with an ABI, or missing the relationship they had with their sibling.
- Resentment - that this injury has 'ruined family life' or that everything will always be different now.
- Mourning and Chronic Sorrow - mourning can be continuous as the presence of the sibling with an ABI is a constant reminder of things that have been lost.

## Relationships and Role change

Depending on the nature and severity of the ABI all family relationships may be affected, especially if the injured person is requiring considerable care.

Some examples include:

- Parents may become over protective of the remaining siblings (this can include adult 'children').
- Parents may have different rules for injured and non-injured offspring – creating a double standard.
- Parents may become focused on the person with the ABI, reducing the time and energy they give to siblings.
- Siblings may need to take on extra jobs and responsibilities at home
- Sibling status may change e.g. injured sibling may now get the support previously allocated to the 'youngest' child.
- Siblings may be required to provide supervision and support.
- Siblings may be required to help with social and recreational activities.
- Siblings may have to educate friends and other family.

### These roles changes may result in:

- Siblings feeling left out as family and friends focus more on the person with the ABI.
- Siblings becoming resentful of the time and money parents are spending on the injured person. Some may feel they are missing out.
- Older siblings feeling resentful that parents are being robbed of their retirement and plans.
- Future responsibility for the injured sibling may start causing concern—"Will I have to look after them when mum and dad are gone?"

## Behaviour Changes

Some changes in behaviour may result:

- Attention seeking behaviours may develop.
- School/university performance may decline.

- Siblings may no longer want to bring friends home or be seen with their sibling (as the behaviour may be challenging or embarrassing).
- Being resistant or unwilling to learn about brain injury or help – 'cannot deal with it'.
- Pushing to leave will leave the home and move out.

## Practical consequences of ABI

A person with an ABI may need help from their siblings in some of the following ways:

- Assistance with the practical care needs at home i.e. feeding, bathing, supervision
- Supervision and/or other support
- Providing respite for parents when they are the carers
- Assistance with managing affairs such as finances and decision making
- Assistance to find appropriate support services.
- Social support with recreational, social or other activities
- Transport or help with transport to appointments

## Useful Strategies

- Ask to be given honest information about the injury and any anticipated effects.
- Obtain information about and try to understand the effects of a brain injury.
- Become involved in the hospitalisation and rehabilitation stages as appropriate.
- Allow time to come to terms with the injury. Each person copes differently at e.g. talking may help for some, others prefer to be alone.
- Be open to involvement in support groups or counselling (with School/University or other counsellors)
- Some activities may assist with adjustment: drawing or writing about the experience, or compiling photo albums
- Keep routines at home as normal as possible.



- Try to spend quality time with each member of the family (including the brother/sister with the brain injury).
- Provide practical help with transport, respite, shopping, housework where possible
- Maintain contact with friends and support networks so there is someone to talk to when this is needed.
- Continue with sporting and social activities. It is important to keep life as normal as possible.

### Acknowledgements

Burnsnall, S. (2003). Supporting Child and Adolescent Siblings Following Acquired Brain Injury. Griffith University; Brisbane.

### Further information

The Synapse website contains further information on supporting and caring for someone after an ABI

<http://synapse.org.au/>

<https://synapse.org.au/understanding-brain-injury/family-and-carers/>

### Resources

See other Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service (ABIOS) Information sheets at

<http://www.health.qld.gov.au/abios/>



### Notes:

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