



# ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

FACTSHEET: **Communication**

Audience: Person with an ABI

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

Ph: (07) 3406 2311

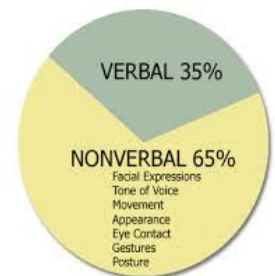
Email: [abios@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:abios@health.qld.gov.au)

## Social Communication (Pragmatics) changes following Acquired Brain Injury

Cognitive difficulties may arise after an acquired brain injury, such as memory, attention, problem solving, planning, organisation, judgment and/or perception. These cognitive difficulties often have an impact on communication, personality and behaviour, and may mean that you act differently – and sometimes inappropriately, in social situations.

The new behaviours may have an impact on your:

- **Verbal (social) communication skills**, such as the words that you say or what you write
- **Non-verbal (social) communication skills**, such as impaired volume of your voice, reduced body gestures, poor perception of a conversation breakdown, or reduced facial expression.



Copyright © 2008 [www.imprinttrainingcenter.blogspot.com](http://www.imprinttrainingcenter.blogspot.com)

### **Changes you may experience...**

- *Talking too much or too little*
- *Reduced eye contact*
- *Limited facial expression*
- *Difficulty initiating a conversation*
- *Difficulty maintaining a conversation*
- *Reduced turn-taking in conversation*
- *Reduced awareness and /or sensitivity to the person they are talking with*
- *Difficulty perceiving personal space*
- *Reduced awareness of their different behaviours and interactions*
- *Excessive swearing*
- *Reduced tolerance – quick to express anger or yell at someone*
- *Inappropriate sexual comments or jokes*

For some it can be combination of both.

The following cognitive impairments can contribute to social communication difficulties...

### **Attention / Concentration problems can lead to:**

- Problems staying on topic
- Difficulty resisting distraction during conversation
- Problems keeping track of what other people are saying

### **Memory problems can lead to:**

- Repeating oneself when talking
- Losing track of the conversation topic
- Mixing up instructions or messages

### **Executive functioning problems can lead to:**

- Having trouble starting conversations
- Interrupting others
- Poorly organised speech
- Excessive talking

### **Impaired social cognition can lead to:**

- Poor use of feedback from others
- Difficulty taking someone else's perspective
- Difficulty understanding sarcasm

*Social Communication after Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI):  
A Guide for Professionals – Margaret A. Struchen, Ph.D*

## What is going Wrong?

Being able to modify your communication according to your environment (E.g. at home, in a café, at work) and according to the person you are communicating with (E.g. partner, child, employer, doctor) are key components of appropriate social communication. It is a complex skill-set, and is necessary to fulfilling successful roles and relationships.



It is this difficulty modifying communication that is often impaired after an acquired brain injury (particularly in traumatic brain injury). You may experience social isolation due to difficulty establishing and maintaining friendships, difficulty finding and maintaining employment, and difficulty identifying leisure activities. It can also be extremely challenging for your family or carer, as the social changes can contribute to carer distress.

## What can be Done?

It is accepted that impaired social skills have far-reaching effects on community participation for a person with an acquired brain injury, and so a variety of approaches have been developed to address these difficulties. The key health professional involved in this area is the Speech Pathologist; however other health professionals have knowledge in this area (e.g. Neuropsychologist).

If you think you require assistance in this area, speak with your treating health professional.

Further information can also be obtained in the '*Behaviour Management*' section on the ABIOS website, or by contacting ABIOS directly – [abios@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:abios@health.qld.gov.au)