

# FACT SHEET:

**Category:**  
Behaviour

**Audience:**  
Professional

For more information  
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ABIOS Neuropsychologist



# ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

## Giving Feedback About Behaviour

### Introduction

After a brain injury, some people will have difficulty with awareness and control of their communication, mood, social skills and behaviour. They may also not realise when behaviour is of concern and creating interpersonal difficulties.

It is important to provide a person with immediate, direct and clear feedback regarding any behaviour of concern.



### When Providing Feedback.....

#### Describe the Behaviour of Concern

Be concrete and describe the behaviour as clearly as possible. A behaviour is something that you can see or observe and describe clearly. Behaviours of concern can include:

- Something the person does e.g. shouting, interrupting, touching, hitting, pinching, slamming doors, crying, uses angry tone of voice, masturbates in public.
- Something the person says e.g. uses swear words, threatens to hit, talks about sexual/personal information, tells joke with sexual theme.

The person must clearly understand which behaviours are appropriate or of concern.

#### Repeat information

If the person has any difficulties with memory and learning, you may need to repeat the information at regular intervals, or try other memory strategies such as writing things down, using signs, checklists or prompts. If a person does not remember or learn what is expected of them immediately or quickly, you may need to build in regular reminders, even each time you see them.

### Make sure the person understands the feedback

If a person has difficulty with comprehension or understanding of information, feedback may need to be simpler. You might need to use pictures, diagrams or other communication aids. Check whether they understand what you are saying.

### Tell the person which behaviours are acceptable or expected

**Limit setting** is essential for consistent management of behaviour because it tells the person exactly what is expected of them in any given situation and prevents them from having unclear or unrealistic expectations.

Set limits as **early** as possible with the person, and set them **often**. These limits may need to be stated clearly with the person e.g. "I am not your girlfriend – I am your support worker".

Limit setting may be about roles, tasks, activities, or about specific behaviours that are appropriate or of concern.

Don't set limits you can't keep to e.g. don't threaten to leave if the behaviour continues and then stay in the situation.

### Feedback should be Simple and Immediate

Don't assume a person will pick up subtle cues about their behaviour.

Information that is too vague or general will leave the person unclear or uncertain about what it is you do and do not like. For example, "I don't like it when you shout loudly at me" is much clearer than "I don't like it when you are rude."

### Feedback should be clear

Unspoken social behaviour rules that you take for granted should be very clear. For example:

- "It is not ok to touch women on the breasts"
- "Hands off"
- "I would rather you didn't talk about..."
- "You are staring at that woman ... she might feel uncomfortable."

### Talk about the behaviour of concern

Try to talk about the behaviour of concern, rather than the person when you are giving feedback. It is important that the person feels like you support **them**, but not the behaviour. For example, "I understand why you are frustrated, but I don't want you to shout at me." Or "let's talk about what we can do about this"

### Give feedback in a calm manner

Try to control your own emotions. Angry or critical behaviour from you or others will likely **trigger** more anger or aggression. Try to be calm and uncritical when you are giving feedback. Feedback should be matter of fact and firm, without strong emotional reactions such as anger, impatience, shock, disapproval or fear.

### Give ideas about alternative behaviours

Give the person clear **alternatives** or **choices** about the behaviour you want them to stop. For example "You sound angry, do you want to talk about this later?" or "Could you wait until I have finished, please?"

It is important for the person to know what they **should** do, not just what they are not to do. For example, ask the person to say please, or speak politely, or wait until you are finished talking.

### Give the person direction about their behaviour of concern

**Redirect** the person to other activities or topics that are appropriate or acceptable. Sometimes a person may need direction regarding alternative topics of conversation or other behaviours that are acceptable.

For example, jokes with a sexual content might not be acceptable, but other jokes might be; touching on the breast or bottom may be off limits, but touching on the hand may be an acceptable alternative.

### Be consistent about behaviour

It is essential to be **consistent** in managing behaviour, especially in setting limits and giving feedback.



Make sure the person with ABI gets the same message from everyone about what behaviour is acceptable or unacceptable.

It is important to be consistent in giving feedback when a number of people are involved – workers, friends, family. This means you have to:

1. identify behaviours that are:
  - a) inappropriate or unacceptable
  - b) appropriate and acceptable
2. decide on management strategies,
3. use the strategies the same way in each situation where they are needed.

**Pay attention to your non-verbal communication**

Pay attention to **your** non-verbal communication i.e. your tone of voice, facial expression, body language, and the way you dress to make sure you are giving clear information. For example, don't laugh at something that you don't find funny, or if it is an inappropriate or unwanted behaviour.

**Reinforce and encourage appropriate behaviours**

Notice examples of behaviour you would like to see more of, and mention it to the person and family. For example, "I've noticed how calm you have been today." and "You really seem to be listening to other people's points of view." and "Thanks for waiting until I finished what I was saying."

Positive feedback and encouragement is an important part of learning and maintaining appropriate behaviour.

Experiment with genuine ways to give encouragement, for example:

- I like the way you did that
- You are doing so well with ...
- I like to see how you are helping other people
- Great job!!
- I admire you for ...
- You seem to be very happy/calm/positive today
- Thank you for your help
- You put a lot of effort into that task
- You got that finished quickly

**Resources**

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



**Notes:**

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