

FACT SHEET:



ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

Category:
Behaviour

Audience:
Families and
Support Workers

How to Respond to Angry Behaviour

Introduction

Anger and aggression are common behavioural problems that result directly from an acquired brain injury. Common concerns include irritability, short temper, verbal or physical outbursts or violence, abusive language (swearing) or threatening behaviour. In more severe cases, it can take the form of physical self-harm or harm to other people and property.

These are some simple ideas to help in responding to angry behaviour from others.

Responding to angry behaviour from others:

Empathy

- Try to understand the other person's point of view – be empathic and interested in what they have to say
- 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 so try to figure out what is triggering anger
- Often people are angry because their needs are not being met in some way—so making the effort to assess or review this is important
- Get to know the person and let them get to know you
- Be positive when you can as it builds empathy and rapport - "I enjoyed talking to you", "How are you going?" and "Thanks" are all important.

Stay Calm

- 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 or neutral 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
- Don't yell back
- Try not to lose your temper or get impatient
- Let the person know that you can't help them if they are angry or yelling at you.

For more information
contact the Acquired Brain
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Reviewed Feb 2021

For review Feb 2022
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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’s complaints or comments but you can say “I can see why you would feel that way”.
- Be personal—use the person’s name.
- 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 people’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 if you know what the triggers are
- 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

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 with others and the person with ABI – 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”
- 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 it with someone you trust, but respect confidentiality – small towns are small towns
- Do some breathing and simple relaxation – before, during and after work so that you are prepared for any stressful situations



