

# 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 Adult Child has an ABI

### Introduction

Adulthood is seen as a time of growth and independence. Parents take great pleasure in watching their children take control of their own lives and begin to plan for a new stage in their own future. Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) can turn this all upside down.



An adult child may lose their ability to be functionally independent and/or they may experience changes in their personality and behaviour. Parents can be called upon to step into a role of carer and/or supervisor, giving up their own plans and future.

It is not surprising that in this time of upheaval and change that feelings and tensions run high. This fact sheet illustrates some possible reactions that parents may experience, how relationships and roles may change, practical consequences of ABI and useful strategies.

### Possible Reactions

In coming to terms with an adult child's ABI a parent can experience a range of emotions. These could include:

- Shock and disbelief – at the immediacy and severity of the injury and its consequences.
- Anger – at the circumstances of the injury, at how it has impacted on your life and how it will change your child's life.
- Grief and loss – at the loss of a 'normal' future, the loss of hopes and dreams (both your child's and your own) and the loss of your child as you imagined them in the future.
- Guilt – for the feeling that you could have "done something better" and for being angry, resentful or frustrated at the changes.
- Loneliness and isolation – as your life takes different directions with different priorities from that of your friends.
- Recurrent grief – grief reoccurs as your child remains in your life but as an altered person. You are periodically reminded of personality and characteristics that have been lost while learning to relate to a different person.

## Relationships and Role Changes

An ABI can affect relationships and change family roles.

Often the greatest change is the need for parents to take on a carer role with an adult child who requires basic personal care and assistance with daily living tasks.

This can be like parenting a young child again and the relationship is no longer an adult relationship.

This can be especially difficult if the person's ABI has also resulted in challenging behavioural problems.

Changes in relationships with an adult child can have many flow on effects, including:

- Worry about relationships with your other children e.g. being overprotective of your other children.
- Diminished relationships with friends and extended family as caring duties take time and energy and your interests shift to those of a carer.
- Strain in your relationship as a couple as you struggle to cope, have less time for each other or maybe have differing views about how care should be provided.
- Providing support to your child's partner or spouse as they come to terms with changes.
- Acting as a mediator/support in your child and their partners relationship as it changes.
- Changes in previously valued roles e.g. giving up work to be a carer, loss of retirement plans.
- Providing care to grandchildren.
- Educating and supporting other family members and friends about brain injury.
- Allowing external carers or lifestyle support workers to come into the home making lives less private.

## Practical Consequences of ABI

There may be many practical consequences of the brain injury. You may find that you need to be involved in provision of:

### Accommodation

- Providing accommodation or sourcing alternative accommodation.

### Care

- Providing or sourcing 'hands on' assistance e.g. feeding, bathing, supervision etc.
- Asking other family members or community services for help.
- Providing transport to appointments and community activities.

### Maintaining connections

- Helping maintain pre-existing relationships.
- Providing social support and social outings.

### Finances

- Assisting in managing finances and making decisions including applying for Centrelink benefits.
- Assisting in managing the effects of the loss of income when the injured person was the primary income earner e.g. mortgage repayments, school-fees.

### Behaviour

- Managing behaviour changes resulting from the brain injury (professional assistance may be required in some cases).



