



ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

FACTSHEET: Communication

Audience: Professionals

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Cognitive Communication strategy table

The following table lists some common cognitive difficulties which directly impact communication. The table is designed to provide specific strategies for the person with the brain injury (the speaker) as well as the person they are speaking with (the communication partner).

| Type of Cognitive difficulty | Strategies for the speaker (the person with the ABI) | Strategies for the communication partner |
|---|--|---|
| Reduced initiation (of activities or topics) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Decide before your meeting or appointment what you want to talk about 2. Encourage your conversation partner to talk about him/herself | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conversations can be started by the person with the ABI 2. Call attention to areas of interest & focus on these |
| Disinhibition | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask yourself before you speak: Do I want this information to be public? 2. Ask yourself before you speak: Will this information hurt or embarrass me or anyone else? | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage the person with the ABI to preview the message in their mind before speaking 2. Encourage the person to think about the impact on self or others |
| Word retrieval | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Focus on the idea, not the words 2. Try to create an image in your mind and describe it | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage the person with the ABI to focus on the idea, not the words 2. Give the person time to talk |
| Losing train of thought | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mentally review what you have said and/or restate the last thing you said 2. Ask your listener to restate the last thing you said | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Allow the person with the ABI time to mentally review what was said 2. Ask if you should restate the last thing said |
| Tangential (or unrelated) communication | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accept feedback when someone tells you they are having trouble following the conversation 2. Announce topic changes | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Let the person with the ABI know you are having difficulty following the conversation 2. Request clarification on the topic or the reason for changing topics |

| Type of Cognitive difficulty | Strategies for the speaker (the person with the ABI) | Strategies for the communication partner |
|---|--|---|
| Decreased memory | 1. If you tend to repeat yourself, let your listener know: "Stop me if I have told you this" 2. Always ask others: "How are you?" | Consider cuing the person with the ABI, for example: " <i>Do you want to know how my interview went?</i> " |
| Decreased ability to read non-verbal communication | Let people know you need them to tell you how they are feeling | Tell the person with the ABI how <u>you</u> are feeling |
| Decreased ability to vary tone of voice | Let people know what you are feeling using words / description | Ask the person with the ABI how he/she is feeling |
| Distractibility / slowed processing | 1. Speaking slowly encourages others to do the same 2. Hold important conversations in quiet places | 1. Call the person with the ABI by name and give him/her time to look at you before you start to speak 2. Speak at a slightly reduced rate of speech |

Adapted from "THE Challenge!" – Brain Injury Association of America