

FACT SHEET:



ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

Category:
Behaviour

Audience:
Person with an ABI

For more information
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Impulsive Behaviour

Introduction

Impulsive behaviour following brain injury is when a person does or says things without thinking in advance. These changes are often due to injury to the brain, particularly to the frontal lobes. Impulsivity may cause difficulty controlling behaviour, and inability to inhibit impulses or resist urges.



Signs of Impulsivity:

- Difficulty waiting for activities or a turn in an activity or conversation
- Acting on an impulse without taking time to think – doing first and thinking later.
- Seeming to “rush” into things without thinking and making mistakes
- Saying things that seem to be “rude” or “tactless”
- Doing something without thinking about the risks or the consequences
- Doing the first thing that comes to mind, rather than thinking about all the options and choosing the best one
- Interrupting other people with demands or requests or interrupting conversations
- Spending all the money that you have in a short space of time, or buying items that are expensive or not essential
- Signing a contract (e.g. mobile phone) the detail of which is not really understood.
- Forgetting appointments and activities because of going off to do something else on the “spur of the moment”
- Not looking for traffic before crossing the road
- Rapid emotional responses such as aggression or anger
- Getting into relationships quickly without knowing the person well, including sexual relationships
- Feeling or thinking “I shouldn’t have done/said that ...” and having regrets about decisions or choices later

Strategies to Cope with Impulsive Behaviour:

Self Regulation

Self-talk is very important for you to think about choices and options before you rush in. Ask:

- “Is this what I really want to do?”
- “Am I ready to do this?”
- “What do I need to get ready?”
- “Have I thought about all the options and the consequences?” – write down a list of pro’s and con’s
- “Do I need more information?”
- “If I do this, what will happen next?”

Social Situations

- In social situations, make sure you aren’t hogging the conversation or talking over other people – allow a pause or break in the conversation
- Sometimes other people can give you a sign if you are interrupting, talking too much, or not saying/doing the right thing
- Know your weaknesses – this means learning from your mistakes, and planning ahead for the future

Support from Others to Keep on Track

- Get support from friends, family and others to use the strategies
- Ask them to remind you of your goals, and to encourage you to choose the best options
- Listen to people that you trust
- Ask for feedback if you think you might seem “rude” or “tactless” or be interrupting others in conversations
- Positive feedback is also really important, so ask people to notice and give you feedback when you are trying not to be impulsive

Setting Goals and Making Plans

- Put time into thinking about your goals and priorities. It is easier to keep on track and to a plan if you have a plan already.
- Write down your plan, and keep it where you can see it.
- Using checklists and reminders will help to keep sight of your priorities and motivated to stick to them.

- Use a diary and calendar to remind you of appointments, and to help you keep track of your goals and your commitments.
- You can use a mobile phone or other reminder system, to prompt you to think about what you are doing, and to stop, think, decide and plan.
- Use other memory aids to help with remembering medication.
- Get information in advance about really important topics (e.g. money, sexual health, medication, looking after small children) so you can make good decisions and choices.
- If you have regular commitments or appointments, it will be useful to have a structure to your week, so that when other things come up, you can make a decision whether and when you can do them.

Bridges

- If you have been impulsive and made some choices that you regret, it is important to learn from the experience and to think about what you could do next time.
- If you have offended someone or hurt other’s feelings, or let someone down, a sincere apology will mend some bridges and make your relationships stronger.
- As soon as you realise you have been impulsive, try to get back on track with your goals and priorities e.g. put in place some checks and balances for the future.

Organising Money and Finances

- If you tend to be impulsive with spending, try to put together a realistic budget.
- Organise ways for regular bills such as rent, electricity and telephone to be paid automatically.
- Remove or limit the temptations of a credit card or debt arrangement. Try to get rid of credit cards, or a least have a low credit limit.
- Don’t carry large sums of money in your wallet when you are going out.
- Don’t sign contracts without fully understanding your commitments

- For social activities etc, give yourself a budget and try to stick to it.
- Some people will need independent administrators to help them manage their money.



Spontaneity

- Even if you are trying to be less impulsive, it doesn't mean you have to give up having some fun, splurging on something occasionally or doing things on the spur of the moment.
- Being spontaneous can make life interesting, but make sure you don't forget your other plans and commitments.

Resources

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

Notes:
