

FACT SHEET:

Category:
Behaviour

Audience:
Family and
Support Workers

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Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

Understanding Egocentricity

Introduction

Egocentricity is a common change after a brain injury. The person with brain injury can seem more self-centred or self-focussed and less aware of the needs and feelings of other people around them.



Why do people seem more self-centred?

Egocentricity or self-centredness can result from changes in functioning as the result of brain injury including:

- Changes in communication and social skills that mean their own needs are expressed in a more direct, demanding way, without the usual social niceties – they may seem rude or demanding or impatient.
- Changes in communication skills (capacity to listen, ask questions) meaning they don't get information about other people's needs, feelings, goals etc.
- Difficulty with attention – so they may only focus on their own thoughts, feelings, needs and not others
- Reduced awareness of the emotions and emotional responses and needs of others so not taking them into consideration
- Difficulty self-monitoring behaviour with others – so they may not pick up when they are being self-focussed, demanding or impatient.
- Reduced ability to keep track of social interactions and responses from others – so not getting the feedback from others
- Impatience or inability to wait for needs to be met by other people around them – so may want things NOW.
- Changes in social skills meaning judgement and reasoning is changed or impaired.
- Concrete or rigid thinking patterns, meaning they see the world only from their own point of view or believe that there is only one way of doing something.
- Memory and learning impairments, meaning they forget information or details of communication or interaction with others

Tips for Living with Egocentricity:

1. Identify the Cause

Try to work out the reason the person is having difficulty with egocentricity or seems self-centered so you know what you can (or can't) do about it.

- is it lack of awareness?
- is it lack of empathy?
- is it poor communication?
- is it inability to wait?
- is it poor judgment?
- is it memory or learning?

2. Provide Feedback and Information

- Provide frequent, non-critical information about the needs, feelings of other people, such as family or friends to direct attention.
- Set limits and give information when you do e.g. "I can't go now because I have to do ... first, so that is why you will have to wait"
- Ask the person questions to direct their attention to information e.g. "How do you think they would feel about ...?"
- "Do you think they are happy/ upset / worried?"
- "What do you think their feelings and thoughts are about?"
- Direct the person's attention to specific areas or examples of where they showed good awareness, consideration or responded to the needs and feelings of other people.
- Provide opportunities for the person to get feedback from other people (family, peers, and friends).
- Praise, praise, praise – give the person lots of positive reinforcement & encouragement.
- Reinforce waiting, turn-taking and social skills and efforts.

3. Nurturing relationships and friendships

Encourage the person to understand what they need to do and say to make and keep friendships and relationships – this may not be obvious to them.

4. Encourage and prompt:

- Making phone calls, writing letters or emails

- Texting friends to keep in touch
- Remembering birthdays and special occasions
- Following up social events
- Initiating contact and suggesting activities with friends/family
- Saying please, thank you and taking turns
- Asking someone what they would like to do.

5. Developing of awareness

- Direct the person's attention to the feelings, thoughts or needs of other people e.g. "I noticed Sue was upset about ..."
- Make suggestions to prompt conversation, questioning, or listening skills e.g. "When you see John why don't you ask him how his work is going".
- Model caring or considerate behaviour in front of the person, and then discuss it with them later, e.g. "Did you notice that I asked how she was feeling today and she said ...? or "Your Dad seemed a bit tired today, what do you think?".
- Talk with the person on a regular basis and encourage them to focus on their communication and social interactions with other people:
 - What went well
 - How would they feel if ...
 - What would they do differently
 - What social or communication skills were being used

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

Social and communication skills are learned over time, and may need to be relearned and practiced. e.g. social groups, coffee shops, over meals, sporting activities.



