

FACT SHEET:

Category:
Behaviour

Audience:
Families and
Support Workers

For more information
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Reviewed Aug 2017

For review Aug 2018
ABIOS Neuropsychologist



ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

Positive Ways to Manage Behaviour



Introduction

There are a range of common behavioural changes following brain injury: irritability, low frustration tolerance, anger, disinhibited social behavior, impulsivity, rigidity/inflexibility, and adynamia. There are no strategies that are guaranteed to eliminate or stop behaviour problems altogether because behaviour may be changed as a result of damage to the brain.

Strategies:

Understand the causes of behaviour

- Get information about the brain injury and the effect the injury has had on the person's behaviour.
- Identify any specific behaviour concerns or changes.
- Understand specific causes or triggers for behaviour:
 - Longstanding personality style e.g. always had a bad temper
 - Habits and preferences and difficulty making adjustments
 - Social and communication skills that may be reduced following ABI
 - Difficulty coping or adjusting to disability e.g. may be easily frustrated, low mood, limited ability to cope with demands
 - Reduced insight and self-awareness of behaviour and inability to self-manage behaviour
 - Social factors and stresses that impact on behaviour – inability to work, drive, live independently, changes physical functioning, leisure and social activities
 - Medical factors – medication, pain, fatigue, seizures or headaches all can cause or worsen behaviour
 - Relationship issues – losses or conflict with others may affect behaviour.
 - Environmental factors – too much noise, too much activity, inability to cope with multiple demands, changes in living situations can also affect behaviour

Positive Choices

- People will behave better if they have meaningful daily activities, experiences and choices.
- Plan for successes and achievements to build confidence
- Focus on increasing the person's self-worth, confidence and pride in
- Activities that are fun and interesting will be more motivating
- Focus on abilities and strengths

Have realistic expectations

- Have a good understanding of the person's strengths and areas of weakness.
- Make sure you compensate for any cognitive problems they may have:
 - Attention and concentration
 - Memory and learning
 - Reasoning and problem solving
 - Planning and organization
 - Understanding/comprehension
 - Speed of information processing
 - Communication and social skills
- Understand what can and can't be changed.
- Set tasks and goals that are within the person's ability – not too easy, not too hard
- Don't expect more from the person than is possible – unrealistic demands create stress and stress worsens behaviour
- Be realistic with yourself– you can't do everything or know everything – ask for help when you need it

Have a routine and provide structure

- Have a consistent predictable routine for daily activities and tasks.
- Let the person know of any changes that are coming up – plan ahead
- Having structure is important because it reduces the demands on cognitive and memory function. The more structure, the more organised a person's life will be

Set clear limits

- Have clear rules and limits about what is expected (in terms of behaviour) of the person and of you - what you can do, and what you can't do
- Talk about the way things might work and set limits early
 - Set the rules or limits clearly - talk about them, write them down

- Review and repeat the rules when you need to
- Don't make rules or set limits that you can't stick to
- Stick to the rules you do set
- Be clear about your role/job early – what you do, what you don't do
- Talk about what is expected (what behaviour is ok, what behaviour is not ok) and why. Don't just impose inflexible rules.

Improve communication

- Listen to the person.
- Let the person know what you are doing and why.
- Get to know the person and their likes and dislikes.
- Support the person to set and achieve their own goals and dreams.
- Find topics and activities that interest and motivate.
- Give the person as many choices as you can – this encourages independence and a sense of control.
- Take into account any difficulties the person may have with understanding what you expect of them:

Give and accept feedback

- Feedback should be clear, direct, and immediate. A person can't change if they don't know what the problem is
- Feedback should not be critical or punishing
- Give positive feedback and encouragement – people learn better when they know they have done well, and when they feel supported
- Positive feedback can build a relationship – practice giving compliments, notice positives about the person and their behaviour
- Admit when you have made a mistake – apologies go a long way to building bridges
- Ask for feedback

Stay calm

- Keep calm and model the behaviour you expect from the person with brain injury – if you can't stay calm, why should they?
- Angry or irritable behaviour from you will likely produce angry or irritable behaviour in someone else
- Don't take what the person says or does personally – it isn't just about you

- Check your own behaviour – be aware of the connection between your mood and behaviour, and how that affects other people around you, including the person with a brain injury. Think about:
 - ◊ What you say
 - ◊ Your tone of voice
 - ◊ Loudness of your voice
 - ◊ Body language
 - ◊ Facial expression
 - ◊ How you feel
 - ◊ What you are thinking

Be respectful

- Treat the person like an adult
 - ◊ in the way you speak to them
 - ◊ the way you give choices
 - ◊ in your expectations about behaviour
- Involve the person in decision making – most people don't like being bossed around, or being told what to do
- Talk about options and alternatives and then let the person make real choices for themselves
- Find out what they like and dislike – don't push your own ideas or preferences or agenda too hard
- Be polite, even when the person is rude to you.

Redirect and shift focus

- Ignore behaviours you know are unlikely to change e.g. swearing, gestures, facial reactions – carry on activities as if these behaviours are not there
- Redirect or distract the person to another topic or activity – make suggestions, direct the person's attention elsewhere, or try something different – be creative!
- Use a sense of humour to break the tension and redirect the conversation onto something different
- Use brief periods of time away from an activity, plans breaks and change activities
- Have a few different ideas "up your sleeve" e.g. a deck of cards, a new activity, the newspaper
- Wait until things calm down and try again later

Resources

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



Notes:

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