

FACT SHEET:

Category:
Behaviour

Audience:
Family and
Support Workers

For more information
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ABIOS Neuropsychologist



ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

Frequently Asked Questions About Behaviour



Introduction

The brain is involved in all aspects of personality and control of behaviour so any brain injury can cause ongoing changes in personality, mood and behaviour.

Common changes in behaviour following ABI include:

- Inflexibility and rigid thinking or behaviours
- Disinhibited or impulsive behaviour
- Difficulty initiating or starting everyday activities
- Irritability, anger and low frustration tolerance
- Lack of insight and reduced self-awareness of problems
- Lack of empathy or feeling for others
- Self-centredness or egocentricity

Not everyone who has had a brain injury will have behavioural changes, but severe brain injury has the potential to cause all of these changes.

For some people, changes in personality and behaviour may be the only sign of a severe brain injury.

Why does behaviour change?

Damage to some areas of the brain (frontal lobes, temporal lobes and the limbic system) can result in changes to the person's ability to be aware of, to control or to change their behaviour. This is because these areas have a role in controlling personality and behaviour.

What can I do about behaviour problems?

The best thing you can do is to get a good understanding of the person's brain injury, and get ideas about the strategies that will help them to manage their behaviour more effectively.

Ask for advice and support from others who know about the behaviour – this might include the person with ABI, family, Therapists, Psychiatrists, Psychologists or a Clinical Neuropsychologist, or other brain injury specialists.

What are some strategies I can use to manage behaviour?

There are some strategies that will help manage, prevent and reduce challenging behaviour.

These include the following:

- Have a routine and provide as much structure as possible
- Try to improve communication – it should be clear, direct, & often– talk about issues, including any changes in behaviour and what to do about it
- Don't be vague – tell the person what behaviour you like/don't like
- Have clear limits/rules about behaviour: what you expect, what is appropriate or inappropriate/not working
- Give the person feedback and information about their behaviour
- Be consistent in the way you manage behaviour
- Give positive feedback often– notice and encourage wanted behaviours – people need at least twice as much positive feedback
- Take into account changes in thinking, understanding or memory and how they might be affecting behaviour
- Use strategies that defuse behaviour and help a person calm down – talk it through, change the topic, change the task.
- Use redirection, distraction, and diversion to shift behaviour.
- Use your sense of humour to defuse things and reduce tension and stress
- Get support for yourself and for the person with the brain injury

How do I not take it personally when the person is irritable, uncooperative or difficult to get along with?

Try to not take the behaviour personally, even though at times you may feel frustrated, hurt, angry, upset or fearful.

Behaviour problems can occur because of

the brain injury and damage to particular parts of the brain and the person may always have some difficulty with awareness, control, and management of their behaviour.

Try to understand the behaviour as part of the person's ABI and disability.

The behaviour is not just directed at you – it would happen to anyone providing care (family, friends, or paid staff). It is important to tell yourself that these behaviours may be due to the person's brain injury and not about you.

However, it is ok to feel the way that you do as coping with difficult behaviour can be hard.

Try to ignore as much unwanted behaviour as you can. Don't ignore the person – just the behaviour.

How can I manage stress?

- Get support from people around you - talk about ways to manage behaviour and cope better – talk to friends, family, or talk to a Counsellor or to a brain injury specialist.
- It may be helpful to talk about ideas to make things work better (try to keep it positive and focus on what you can do, not what you can't).
- Make sure you take the time to have regular breaks. It is important to make the time for your own relaxation and rest, so you have enough physical and emotional energy.
- Keep in touch with your friends and keep up with your own hobbies and interests as much as you can
- Find out about more about brain injury so you can understand any difficulties that the person may have.

