

# FACT SHEET:



# ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

**Category:**  
Behaviour

**Audience:**  
Professional

For more information  
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ABIOS Neuropsychologist

## Positive ways to Manage Behaviour

### Introduction

To prevent and manage behaviour changes in a person after an acquired brain injury, it can be effective to provide positive support

There are no strategies that are guaranteed to eliminate or stop behaviour of concern altogether because behaviour may be changed as a result of damage to the brain.

### Understand the causes of behaviour

- Inflexibility and rigid thinking or behaviour
- Disinhibited and 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 can cause all of these changes.

### 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 themselves.
- 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
  - 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 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 organized 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
- Let the person know what is expected of them (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

#### 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 behavior
- Involve the person in decision making
  - most people don't like being bossed around, or being told what to do
- Talk about their options and alternatives and then let them make real choices for themselves wherever possible
- Find out what they like and dislike – don't push your own ideas or preferences
- Be polite, even when the person is rude to you.

**Redirect and shift focus**

- Ignore behaviours of concern that 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, plan 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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