

# FACT SHEET:



# ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

**Category:**  
Behaviour

**Audience:**  
Professional

## Cognitive and Behavioural Changes and Strategies



### Introduction

After acquired brain injury, a person may have a many cognitive and behavioural changes that affect their ability to study, work, drive, and live independently and their social and family relationships. These are some simple and practical strategies to compensate for some of these changes in everyday life.

For more information  
contact the Acquired Brain  
Injury Outreach Service  
(ABIOS)

PH: (07) 3406 2311


Email: [abios@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:abios@health.qld.gov.au)


Address: PO Box 6053, Buranda 4102


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ABIOS Neuropsychologist

Cognitive or Behavioural change	What this means	Strategies for the person with brain injury
<b>Memory and Learning</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Difficulty remembering ongoing events, information, instructions, misplacing objects, forgetting names, details of conversation, forget appointments</li><li>• Difficulty learning new tasks or information</li><li>• Difficulty learning new behaviour or skills</li><li>• Memory impairments may be short term (recent information and events) or long term (for information or events over the lifetime)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use memory aids wherever possible, such as a diary, calendar, notepads, reminders, timers or alarms</li><li>• Try to make lists and keep them practical and easy to find</li><li>• Keep information and important items (keys, wallet, address book etc) in the same place</li><li>• Use prompts and reminders to help memory – checklists, signs, another person</li><li>• Repeat information, especially instructions or new information</li></ul>

Cognitive or Behavioural change	What this means	Strategies
<b>Planning and organisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May have difficulty planning ahead for activities</li> <li>• May be disorganised</li> <li>• May not think ahead or anticipate consequences of actions or choices</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure and routine will help in organising daily activities &amp; tasks</li> <li>• Use aids such as a diary, notebook, or lists to help plan activities and, appointments, and to remind about birthdays, social events</li> <li>• Set aside planning time each day or weekly</li> <li>• Make sure instructions are simple</li> <li>• Break down big tasks into small steps</li> <li>• Checklists are good for keeping on track</li> </ul>
<b>Reaction times and information processing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May take longer to take in information, to think about things, make decisions, or to act</li> <li>• May have trouble in group activities or conversations e.g. keeping up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow extra time to process and understand new information or to finish a task</li> <li>• Plan for extra time for activities and tasks and set realistic goals</li> <li>• Allow more “thinking” time</li> <li>• Don’t rush or overload the person</li> </ul>
<b>Initiation and Completing Activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty getting started with a task or activity</li> <li>• Difficulty with motivation and getting going with tasks and activities</li> <li>• May have difficulty following through once an activity is started at each new step or stage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure and routine will help in getting activities done</li> <li>• Use prompts to start and continue activities e.g. alarm clocks, mobile phones, visual reminders</li> <li>• Find a range of activities that are interesting to increase motivation and interest</li> <li>• Help the person to get started and keep involved in an activity i.e. it’s more fun to do things with others than on your own</li> </ul>
<b>Awareness or insight about changes as the result of brain injury</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May not be aware of problems</li> <li>• May have trouble understanding changes and what to do about them</li> <li>• May not agree with others about impairments</li> <li>• May not be aware of other’s concerns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find out information about brain injury, and how the brain injury has affected the person with abi</li> <li>• Give feedback and encourage others to give feedback</li> <li>• Talk to the rehabilitation coordinator or other professionals about strategies and ideas</li> </ul>

Cognitive or Behavioural change	What this means	Strategies
<b>Thinking and Reasoning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inability to generate ideas or thoughts</li> <li>• Difficulty doing or thinking about something from more than one point of view</li> <li>• Trouble shifting ideas or beliefs</li> <li>• Gets “stuck” on ideas, topics, or behaviour</li> <li>• Difficulty changing behaviour</li> <li>• May have trouble with comprehension and reasoning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start with very small changes or compromises</li> <li>• Suggest the person think about or try a different idea or approach</li> <li>• Write down lots of different ideas and choices</li> <li>• Encourage the person to get ideas from other people</li> <li>• Get them to weigh up the “pros” and “cons” of ideas</li> </ul>
<b>Ability to control and manage behaviour</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May act on impulse, before thinking through an idea or action</li> <li>• May not think about the consequences e.g. spending all money and having none left for bills</li> <li>• Saying things without thinking – may seem rude or abrupt or tactless to others</li> <li>• May express ideas or needs in inappropriate way, with inappropriate person or in the wrong situation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage the person to “STOP – THINK – THEN DO”</li> <li>• Plan ahead e.g. “what should you do when...?”</li> <li>• Talk through consequences without blaming or telling the person what to do/not do</li> <li>• Get the person to think about what the “social rules” are in certain situations and what is “ok” or “not ok”</li> <li>• Use cues and prompts to keep the person on track e.g. in social situations</li> </ul>
<b>Emotional Changes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty controlling emotions e.g. inappropriate crying or laughter</li> </ul> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to distract the person by changing the topic or the activity</li> <li>• Encourage other people to ignore some of the laughing or crying until you gain control</li> <li>• Watch for factors such as over-stimulation, stress, and fatigue which can increase likelihood of the behaviour occurring</li> <li>• Distraction or relaxation techniques can help with these emotions but will need practice</li> </ul>
<b>Social Awareness and Empathy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May have difficulty with empathy for others</li> <li>• May lack awareness of feelings and needs of others</li> <li>• May be more focussed on own needs</li> <li>• May be impatient and want things done immediately</li> <li>• May be demanding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage awareness of other peoples needs, feelings, thoughts</li> <li>• Practice social skills</li> <li>• Model the skills needed</li> <li>• Plan activities that build social and friendship relationships e.g. keeping in touch, remembering birthdays, asking people how they are going</li> </ul>

Cognitive or Behavioural change	What this means	Strategies
<p><b>Sexuality and Behaviour</b></p>	<p>Expressing sexual needs and interests in an inappropriate manner or time, or with an inappropriate person</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual comments or innuendo</li> <li>• Jokes</li> <li>• Inappropriate touching of others</li> <li>• Sexual propositions</li> <li>• Exhibitionism</li> <li>• Masturbation in public</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear limits and feedback about acceptable or unacceptable behaviour</li> <li>• Be firm and clear</li> <li>• Be non-judgemental</li> <li>• Discuss sexuality and any issues with an appropriate person e.g. GP, Psychologist, Social Worker, or with Family Planning</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for the person to have privacy</li> </ul>
<p><b>Anger and Temper Control</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irritability, crankiness</li> <li>• Temper outbursts</li> <li>• Less control of frustration levels and temper</li> <li>• Verbal aggression or physical aggression towards self or others e.g. hitting, kicking, punching, swearing, threats</li> <li>• Property damage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• De-escalation and calming strategies—defuse where possible</li> <li>• Clear communication to prevent misunderstandings</li> <li>• Look at triggers or causes, for example, do they get irritable when they are tired or have too many things to do at once?</li> <li>• Remove yourself until the person can calm down</li> <li>• Avoid winding the person up</li> <li>• Limit access to drugs and alcohol where possible</li> <li>• Remain calm— use relaxation and other strategies to help you calm down</li> <li>• Discuss different ways of managing irritability and temper with a professional</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mood</b></p>	<p>Depression and anxiety can be experienced after a severe disability, and can also result from changes in circumstances e.g. loss of work, loss of independence, changes in relationships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find positive and rewarding activities</li> <li>• Link to professionals for specialist help e.g. GP, psychiatrist, psychologist</li> </ul>



Cognitive or Behavioural change	What this means	Strategies
<b>Independence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May feel more socially isolated, lonely and or have fewer social relationships</li> <li>• Changes in leisure, social and work activities so less opportunity to see friends and family</li> <li>• May have less contact with friends from before the brain injury</li> <li>• Changes in decision making ability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain the person's links with as wide a range of people and activities as possible</li> <li>• Work on their skills in building relationships with other people</li> <li>• Maintain involvement in community and leisure interests and activities</li> <li>• Encourage the person to try new things and "give something a go".</li> <li>• Aim for independent choices and decision making</li> </ul>

**Resources**

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

