



ABI, behavioural changes and tips

The main cause of behavioural changes that follow an acquired brain injury stems from the inability of the person to control their behaviour due to the cognitive effects of their injury. These behaviours can cause stress for those with a brain injury and/or their carers. People are judged by their behaviour and those who act outside the accepted boundaries are often excluded.

Those with an acquired brain injury may 'break the rules' associated with:

- how close to stand to other people
- when it is appropriate to interrupt another person who is speaking
- when and how to show emotions
- how to interpret and respond to nonverbal communication.
- when to speak and how to get a point across.
- the early stages of recovery these problems may not be obvious. However, long-term irreversible brain damage sometimes occurs resulting in specific problem behaviours.

How it effects daily life

ABI can cause effects such as:

- self-centredness, tactlessness and reduced emotional sensitivity
- childlike behaviour
- lack of social skills and self-care
- impulsivity (acting first and thinking later)
- anger (verbal and physical aggression) and lack of skills to deal with frustration, impatience and stress
- increased or decreased libido
- fatigue and lack of motivation
- increased emotional dependency
- lack of self-awareness - impaired self-awareness makes it difficult to see how they are impacting on others
- attention and concentration issues
- lack of mental flexibility – need for a structured and routine environment
- sexual changes – lack of inhibitions, decreased/increased sexual drive
- lack of trust in others – paranoid tendencies and suspicion of others

A person with a brain injury may need to relearn skills such as anger management, how to be assertive rather than aggressive, how to solve problems and see things from others point of view.

What can I do?

How others respond to these behavioural changes will effect the rehabilitation of the individual. It is important to keep the emphasis on the behaviour rather than personality of the person affected.

This helps to:

- maintain a greater sense that change is possible
- specify what is happening in clear and concrete terms
- direct any disapproval away from the individual and onto the behaviour



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What can I do?

The steps for responding to challenging behaviour include:

- observing and measuring the behaviour
- identifying what caused the behaviour – what happens before the behaviour, analysis of the behaviour and consequences of the behaviour
- developing realistic expectations about change and how to measure the results
- identify and evaluate the possible approaches and strategies for change and reviewing the programme
- develop a behaviour management program

The family needs to work with the rehabilitation team to help their loved on learn new strategies and provide feedback on their behaviour and communication.

Tips

There are many different approaches and strategies to encourage individuals to change their behaviour.

These include:

- modifying the environment or routine.
- giving the person feedback about the behaviour.
- changing expectations and demands placed upon the person.
- teaching the person new skills and behaviours.
- changing how people around the person react.
- psychological support.
- medication.

It may not be possible to change all behaviours at once, or in all situations.

It is important not to lose sight of the person's rights. In spite of best intentions, the person concerned may not want to alter their behaviour. If so, then they have the right to behave in a way that challenges the norms of the community. People cannot be punished for their behaviour unless it is by the law. Neither can they be restrained against their will or forced to conform to rules without consent. The excuse 'It is for their own good' is not sufficient reason to deprive another citizen of their rights under the law.

Please remember you are not alone.

Headwest's trained and compassionate advocates understand what clients, their Carers and family are facing. Let us help you to gain access to the best services for you following an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI).

Our service is free and confidential

Freecall: 1800 626 370

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