

Behavior Changes After A TBI



Family members often realize following a TBI that their loved one is just not the same person they were before the injury. A piece of them seems to be missing or to have changed.

Some of the most common changes in behavior are listed below. Your loved one may not have all of these or may have others that are not listed.

Inappropriate or Embarrassing Behavior:

- Tells strangers about personal matters that people usually keep quiet about and asks personal questions of others he/she does not know well.
- Makes embarrassing sexual comments or gestures in public.
- Cusses a lot.



Anger and Temper Tantrums

- Becomes angry at things that never would have bothered him/her before.
- Yells a lot; uses foul language; throws objects or slams fist into things.
- Threatens or shows physical aggression to family members or others.

Impulsivity (Acting Quickly Without Thinking)

- Says or does whatever comes to mind, without thinking first or considering consequences.
- Dangerous actions (walking into the street without looking; etc.).

Depression and Lack of Motivation/Initiation

- Seems to sit all day staring at the TV.
- Knows what needs to be done, but can't seem to get started.
- Seems sad a lot of the time and keeps to him or herself; not interested in talking with other people.
- Lost interest in things he or she once enjoyed.
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeps too much; seems to have no energy.
- Says things like "It would have been better if I had died in the accident."

Remember...

Changes in behavior and emotions are due to the brain injury. Your loved one is not trying to act in a different way, and they cannot make themselves return to the way they were before the injury.



Please visit www.ahif.org or call the AHIF office at (800) 433-8002 to confirm the appropriate AHIF Resource Coordinator for your location.

Ways of Coping with Behavior Changes



How you can help with Inappropriate or Embarrassing Behavior

- Calmly let your family member know that the behavior is wrong and bothers people.
- Come up with a signal that you can use to let your family member know he or she is acting inappropriately. An example might be holding up two fingers, or a small wave of the hand.
- Set up a reward system with your loved one. If they go on an outing without exhibiting such a behavior, they can have a reward you agree on before the outing begins.
- If your loved one is acting inappropriately, stop whatever activity you are doing. If you are shopping, leave the store and go home to demonstrate you can only go out if they act appropriately.

How you can help with Anger and Temper Tantrums

- Understand that being irritable and getting angry is due to their brain injury. Try not to take it personally.
- When possible, ignore yelling and cussing. Paying too much attention can make the behavior worse.
- Set rules for communication. Tell them it is O.K. to let you know they are upset about something, but that they need to do it in a calm way.
- Do not engage them when they are yelling or throwing a tantrum. Tell them you are going to give them 5-10 minutes and then come back, but that you will not speak to them when they are acting this way.
- If you feel afraid your loved one might hurt you or someone else, you may need to consider having your family member live somewhere else and also seek professional help.



How you can help with Impulsivity

- Stop them when they are acting without thinking; talk calmly to them about the consequences of what they are doing.
- Develop a special signal that will let them know they are acting this way.
- Remove items that could be used dangerously, such as knives, weapons or even car keys.

How you can help with Depression

- Understand that depression can be a good sign that your family member has become aware of the problems they are facing, but need help dealing with this realization.
- Talk with your family member's doctor about the possibility of medication to help with depression. Keep in mind that signs of depression are often also symptoms of brain injury, and do not always indicate the presence of depression.
- Offer to talk with your family member about their feelings. Let them know you support them and realize how much their injury has changed things.
- Get your family member involved in activities that can take their mind off feeling sad.
- Have your family member see a professional that understands brain injury and depression.

