

Lack of Awareness After a TBI



A person with brain injury may not be able to recognize new disabilities they have, even when they are obvious to others, or may not realize the extent of a disability. This is a common problem in individuals who suffer a moderate to severe TBI known as lack of self-awareness. When this happens it becomes difficult for a person to assess his or her own ability and limitations, and may causes problems during the recovery process.

Did You Know?

Self-Awareness means understanding our own strengths and weaknesses. Our sense of self-awareness is housed in the frontal lobe of the brain.

Signs of Lack of Awareness in a TBI Survivor

- Never seems concerned, as if nothing is different.
- Insists that they can do things just as well as before the injury. Or wants to do activities that you know they can't do.
- Complains that the doctors and you "don't know what you're talking about."
- Blames other people for the things they can't do (e.g., "I can go back to work, but the doctor won't let me").
- May lash out toward their caregivers because they feel as though they are "being babied" or controlled.
- Survivors may push themselves too hard, and accidentally hurt themselves or someone else.
- May become frustrated when they fail at tasks.



Remember...

This lack of awareness often causes TBI survivors to blame others for things they cannot do, like doctors, therapists or even family members and caregivers.

As hard as this may be, try not to take this personally. They are not truly blaming you...their unawareness creates a need to blame something or someone for what they know isn't quite right within themselves.



How You Can Help Your TBI Survivor with Lack of Awareness

- Be patient with your family member. Your family member is not ignoring problems on purpose. Sometimes the brain injury makes a person unable to recognize problems. Other times denial is a way of dealing with what they have lost.
- Point out problems when they occur, but do this in a kind, calm, and constructive way. An example would be “I know you like to do it this way, but what if we tried it another way...”
- Do not yell or get angry with them...sometimes it is best to agree to disagree.
- When it is safe, let them make mistakes on their own. This may sometimes be the only way to make them see what problems they have. Remember to talk things over with them after they make the mistake. Help them think of a way to get around their problems next time.
- When the survivor is at risk of harming him/herself or others, the survivor must be confronted directly and immediately. Ideally, the situation can be handled without the survivor feeling embarrassed or infantilized.



Are There Professional Interventions?

Sometimes lack of self-awareness can be treated professionally. The first step is usually a neuropsychological assessment to evaluate the person's cognitive strengths, weaknesses, and better determine the impaired awareness. From this a treatment plan can be developed with the assistance of the family.

Treatment may consist of various psychotherapeutic techniques, and the teaching of strategies to anticipate and plan for problems. Treatment methods will vary depending on the severity of lack of awareness and the individual goals.

Need More Information?

Please contact your local Resource Coordinator.

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