

Changes Following a Brain Injury

Brain Injury can cause changes in:

- Communication
- Cognition
- Memory
- Mood
- Judgement
- Impulse Control
- Sensory processing
- Physical Ability

This can result in

- **Slower processing of information** – it may appear that the person has ignored what you have said/asked them to do, however it may be that their brain is still processing what you have said and then processing the response that they need to produce.

Try to allow the person time to think and respond.

- **Short Attention span** – the person may not be able to hold their attention for long and it may appear that they are “switching off” or ignoring you.

Try to keep instructions/conversations short and to the point. Check that they have understood what you have said before giving the next bit of information. Try to minimise distractions when having conversations – noise, bright lights, busy environment etc.

- **Altered Reasoning, Problem Solving and Decision Making** – if someone struggles with processing information, has poor attention and memory then it can be difficult for them to rationalise their thoughts, solve problems and make decisions.

You can assist them with decision making by giving small chunks of information at a time and allowing them to make one decision at time.



Sourced from ACC8319 Concussion Education Sheet

- **Altered Memory** – the ability to embed new information, store new memories is often impaired, while the person may have excellent recollection of what happened to them 10 years ago, they may not remember what happened 10 minutes ago.

Write important information down or get them to write it down so they don't forget.

Give simple, single step instructions eg. Instead of saying "can you collect your clothes from the laundry put them away, make your bed, then come back and set the table" say "can you collect your clothes from the laundry" when they have done that say "now take them to your room and put them away". Then once they have completed this task then ask them to make their bed. Then when they have completed this then ask them to set the table.

- **Altered Awareness of their own behaviour and what is socially acceptable** –following brain injury the person may become disinhibited and act in ways that are inappropriate. Their awareness of what is socially acceptable may be poor and their awareness of their own behaviour may also be poor. Their ability to be able to see others perspectives and to read social situations can be impacted and this can lead to them placing themselves in risky situations. They may be easily led and influenced by others.
- **Altered Judgement and Impulse control** – their ability to think things through and be aware of consequences may be limited. They may also have lost their ability to read others and to be aware of what is and isn't socially acceptable or appropriate. This can lead to them engaging in risky behaviour and/ or being taken advantage of or manipulated by others.
- **Altered sensory processing** may result in the person not being able to tolerate loud noises, bright lights, busy/crowded environments. If they are in a situation where they are in sensory overload or are stressed by these things then their ability to listen to and understand others will be negatively impacted.
- **Physical Ability** may be impaired resulting in weakness, reduced co-ordination, reduced balance, altered mobility, muscle spasm/tightness, joint pain and or instability.

Changes Following a Brain Injury

- **Mood Emotional Changes** – following brain injury a person may experience changes in their emotions/mood and their ability to recognise and control emotions and mood. Some people may have very low mood and appear flat or depressed, others may have huge mood swings being quite upbeat at times then down in the dumps at other times. Often following brain injury people have a lot lower threshold for irritability and anger. They may not be aware that things are building up for them/that they are nearing their threshold and it may appear to them and those around them that they “suddenly explode”. Some may be “emotionally labile” and laugh or cry inappropriately in response to what is going on around them, this is totally out of their control and often causes them embarrassment.

The person’s ability to manage their emotions can often be impacted by their level of fatigue, external stimulus such as noise, bright lights, feelings of frustration – not feeling that they have been heard/listened to, not being able to understand what is happening around them, loss of control over their situation.

Mood changes can make it very challenging for those around the brain injured person, trying to remember that the brain injury has impacted the person’s ability to recognise and control their mood may help you manage your own emotions when dealing with them. Try to keep communication clear and concise to limit misunderstandings, allow the person time to process and respond to things so that they feel heard and to lessen their level of frustration/stress. But set boundaries for communication and tell them if their behaviour is not acceptable. Call time out to allow everyone to calm down then revisit the conversation.



Sourced from ACC8319 Concussion Education Sheet

- **Altered communication** –following brain injury a person may have difficulty with communication, this may be verbal language, written language or both. Some people have difficulty with either expressive (being able to speak or write their thoughts) or receptive (being able to make sense of what is being said to them, what they are reading) and some people may have difficulty with both receptive and expressive.

Do not assume that if someone has difficulty finding or producing the words they want to say that they don't understand what you are saying to them. Ability to speak does not equate with intellect.

Often people will cope reasonably well with one to one conversations but struggle when they are talking with more than one person. This may be due to their ability to process information quickly enough to keep up with the thread of the conversation, their ability to switch focus from one person to the next, their ability to maintain attention and /or their ability to screen out distractions. Or it may be that they are thinking so hard about what they want to say that they lose track of where the conversation is at.

They may rely heavily on body language to help them to interpret what is being said, or they may have lost their ability to read body language.

When communicating with someone who has had a brain injury try to slow down and allow them time to process what is being said and to form and produce their response. Use clear, concise sentences. Look directly at them so they can see facial expressions and gestures to help them interpret what is being said (this won't work for all). If possible reduce distractions – bright lights, background noise etc. Check in to ensure they have understood what you have said, if you think they haven't then ask them if they need you to repeat or rephrase the question. If you are having difficulty understanding what they are saying then seek clarification – "I think you are telling me... is that correct?"