

Adults with Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Parenting Children Advice for Parents with ABI, their Partners and Carers

When a parent sustains an ABI, his or her capacity to parent children is often affected. Parenting is a highly complex and essential skill, and calls upon many abilities that can be impacted by ABI. These include high level cognitive skills, such as planning, problem solving, flexible thinking, creativity, tolerance, the ability to empathise with others and the ability to remember. It is important to ensure that after ABI, adults are given support to return to parenting to the maximum degree that they are capable.

For an individual whose parenting capacity has been impacted by ABI, the ability to return to parenting may require flexibility as they adapt to a change in parenting roles. An individual may have to take on different parenting tasks, share some tasks or relinquish others to a partner or other support person, should particular parenting tasks prove difficult.

If you, or a person you are supporting, have an ABI and are parenting children it is important to:

- Determine which parenting tasks have been affected by the ABI. You will find it helpful to do this with your partner or another person in whom you have trust and who has observed you parenting your children. You might want to brain storm on paper all of the tasks involved in your parenting and consider the changes of which you are both aware. It is very important to obtain specific feedback from the other person to gain a clear idea of the areas they think are your strengths and those areas where problems exist.
- Once you have identified which parenting tasks are difficult for you, it is important to explore how you might be able to improve your ability to carry out those tasks. You may start by examining each task individually and identifying the steps involved in completing that task. It may be useful to observe another person carry out the task, practise the task yourself with step by step instructions and feedback from another person, or use a strategy such as writing down the steps to help you complete the task independently.

- If you identify a number of parenting areas that you find difficult it is probably best to work on just one or two at any one time. If you are making progress with one task, give yourself time to develop a sense of competence with that task and then introduce a new task from your list.
- It is important to negotiate with your partner as to how you are going to divide parenting tasks. Many partners divide parenting tasks informally without specific discussion, but following an ABI it will be important for you to identify which parenting tasks belong to each of you. As a general rule, you should focus on areas with which you have the least difficulty and leave areas you find really difficult to your partner or another person who can support you. Hopefully you will be able to negotiate roles with which you are both happy. It will be important to identify which parenting tasks you want to work on and improve and that you review each of your parenting tasks as often as is helpful for you.
- It may be that you need to ask family or trusted friends to assist you with some areas of parenting. All children benefit from the interest and time of adults besides their parents. This could involve support with a wide range of tasks, such as getting lunches ready before school, picking your children up from childcare on time, setting limits on behaviour, assisting with your children's participation in sports, or any other areas where you or your partner are unable to provide the input required.
- As a general rule, children benefit from clear information about what is going on around them. As changes occur in parenting roles, it is beneficial to discuss this with children on a regular basis. Children then have the opportunity to ask questions about these changes and clarify their understanding around different parenting roles.

This information sheet has been prepared by Melbourne ABI Counselling. Melbourne ABI Counselling provides specialist counselling for people affected by Acquired Brain Injury. If you would like to discuss your situation with a counsellor, please feel free to contact our office on 1300 29 76 09.

For more information sheets on topics related to acquired brain injury please see <http://melbourneabiccounselling.com.au/abi-information-sheets.htm>