

Caring for a Person with an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Advice for Family Members and Carers

While an ABI is a life changing experience for the person who sustains the injury, it is also a life changing experience for those who are called upon to care for that individual. Carers tend to be people who are close to the injured person, and who may put their lives on hold to meet the needs of the person with the disability. All carers reflect differently on their experience of being in the caring role, but many carers make massive sacrifices, feel pushed to the edge of their capacities, and find caring an isolating role. Caring is a commitment to the wellbeing of a loved family member, and this reason alone drives carers to continue in this challenging role.

If you are caring for a person with ABI it is important that you find a balance between making sacrifices and looking after your own needs. To maximise your capacity to be a carer for the long term it is important to:

- Ensure that you are well informed about all aspects of the person's ABI. You need to understand the person's specific injury, how this affects their behaviour and emotions, and what you can be doing to help them achieve their best. It is also important that you have a good understanding of any rehabilitation in which the person is participating and if there is anything you can be doing to support these therapies in day to day life.
- If the person displays challenging behaviours, it is essential that you have a behaviour management program that makes sense to you in order to deal with this. You need to understand how to implement any identified strategies and ensure that you feel comfortable with the program. This needs to be monitored and adapted over time. An ABI specialist can help you to devise a behaviour management program.
- It is really helpful to know who to consult regarding any concerns you have about the person's situation. This may involve developing a relationship with their GP, rehabilitation specialists, carer agencies and anyone with relevant knowledge of the person and their life.
- Do not give up your whole life for the sake of the person for whom you are caring. Ensure that you continue to do some things, even

- if small, that you value and enjoy. This is good for your emotional wellbeing and, as such, for the person for whom you care.
- It is essential to maximise the opportunities you have in the day to do things for yourself; to socialise, recuperate, tend to your family and meet the needs of your life and that of your family. In order to achieve this, you may need to be assertive regarding your own needs, or it may not happen. Different carers need different periods of time away from the person for whom they are caring. It is helpful to think about how much time you need and work towards structuring your schedule to achieve this. Although not always possible, ideally this would involve regular breaks during the day, regular respite, and holidays away from the person for whom you are caring; this is a break for you both. In the long term, this will allow you to be a better carer.
 - When the going gets tough, and most carers say that it does, it is important that you have a plan for managing these situations. This may involve having a supportive friend with whom to debrief, being part of a carers group, or seeking the support of a professional counsellor.

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>