

Egocentricity (self-centredness) following Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) **Advice for Family Members and Carers**

Increased self-centredness is one of many changes in personality that can occur following an ABI. This is usually due to damage to the part of the brain which enables people to monitor their own and others behaviour; to see things from another's point of view; to empathise and imagine how another person is feeling; and to predict the needs of others. However, the tendency of families to gear everything towards the needs of the person with the brain injury, particularly in the early days after the injury, can also unintentionally encourage the development of self-centred behaviour.

A person who has become more self-centred following an ABI may dominate conversation and talk only about themselves, or about topics that are directly related to themselves, with no acknowledgement of the conversational needs or interests of others. Egocentricity may also extend to aspects of the person's behaviour, such as attention seeking behaviour, child-like demands and a tendency to act as though focus should continually be upon them and their needs.

In addition to these difficult changes in personality, the individual is usually unaware of the egocentric behaviour which further compounds the difficulty faced by family members. Changes in personality are often the most difficult for family and friends to adapt to and accept.

If you are supporting someone who has become more self-centred following an ABI, please consider the following points:

- It is important to understand and try to accept that these changes are genuinely caused by the ABI and thus try to avoid blaming the person for their increased self-centredness.
- Once you have acknowledged that the egocentric behaviour is a result of the ABI, it is important to identify ways in which you can manage the behaviour that works for both you and the person with ABI. You may require the support of an ABI professional to do this.

- Do not give in to self-centred demands. Practise saying no in an assertive and non-demeaning way so that you can do this comfortably and with confidence.
- Avoid doing everything for the person with the injury (within limits appropriate to their abilities), or making yourself available to assist them at all times, even if it takes longer for them to do a task themselves.
- Set clear expectations regarding the behaviour that is expected of everybody who lives in your home and the responsibilities of each person in the home.
- Where possible, try to discuss the problem with the person with the ABI at a time when you are most likely to have a constructive conversation (not when either of you are upset). Talk specifically about the changes you have noticed (for example, ‘...you only watch the TV shows that you like’) and try not to get into a battle about who is right. Be sure to talk about egocentric behaviour as a common change to occur after an ABI, rather than a problem specific to them personally. If possible include them in brainstorming strategies to manage their self-centredness.
- You may be able to have a discussion about how they would like you to let them know when you have noticed self-centred behaviour. For example, together you may decide that in social situations you will give the person with ABI a particular signal if they start to behave inappropriately.
- As well as discussing this difficult topic, try to also comment on qualities about the person that you appreciate.
- Do not give up your whole life to care for the person with an ABI. Try to keep up as many friendships, interests or roles outside the house as possible. The support of others may enable you to do this.

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>