

VERBAL AGGRESSION

People who have sustained a brain injury tend to have a low tolerance for frustration. They are prone to become irritable and lose their temper easily. Often their anger will be completely out of proportion to the situation, and there may be physical aggression.

The principles of behavior management outlined above should be used when dealing with aggressive behavior. The first and most important thing to remember when dealing with these problems is that they are the result of the brain injury. The person with the brain injury cannot help it. Try not to take their anger personally.

It is important to ignore the outburst, making no direct response to it. If it is possible, remove them from the situation that provoked the anger, or leave the room yourself – make no comment – return after two minutes, (if the head injured person has settled) continue the activity. If the head injured person behaves appropriately, give positive reinforcement. If verbal abuse begins again repeat the above procedure. If abuse continues postpone the procedure.

It is frequently possible to identify the things that cause the brain injured person to become agitated and avoid them. Some precipitating factors may include boredom, fatigue, noise, over stimulation, forcing the person with a head injury to persist with tasks that are frustrating or difficult, being talked down to, the time of day, or it may simply be a way of gaining attention. Keep a note of situations that agitated the person for further reference.

It may be possible to recognise the signals of impending agitation and take steps to calm or reassure, to divert their attention, to alter the activity, or remove them from the situation completely.

It is very easy for family to become irritated with the person with a brain injury when they become irritable. This can result in the physical and emotional distance between the brain injured person and family. A pattern can develop where the person's behavior is met by seclusion, which tends to exaggerate their feelings of panic, frustration, disorientation and loneliness. This leads to further isolation of the person with a brain injury.

