

Behavior Guidelines

People with brain injury often have difficulty in understanding how their behavior affects others. When this is the case, the environmental conditions surrounding people with traumatic brain injury (TBI) can have a significant impact on behavior, without the person with a brain injury fully appreciating that fact. Organize the setting and plan the approach to the person, to increase opportunities for successful learning and decrease behavioral problems.

Allow time for rest – people with TBI can be extremely fatigued, which can be a strong antecedent to a behavioral episode. However, do not let fatigue be used as an escape from compliance.

Keep the environment simple – people with TBI are easily over-stimulated so distractions should be kept to a minimum.

Keep instructions simple – directions should be as concrete as possible. Use non-verbal cues, such as gesturing if the person has difficulty processing auditory information.

Give feedback and set goals – self-monitoring skills can be diminished following brain injury, so provide frequent feedback and set goals to help the person understand how and why they are doing a task.

Be calm and redirect – remaining calm can help reduce agitation by demonstrating control, creating a nonthreatening environment and not inadvertently reinforcing a problem behavior.

Provide choices – this can help the person feel an element of freedom and control over his or her environment. However, use “limited” choices so there is no opportunity to say “no” or for the person to feel overwhelmed.

Decrease chances of failure – try to keep the success rate above 80%. This ensures the person feels both successful and challenged.

Vary activities – alternate activities to maintain interest. Interspersing easy tasks with more difficult ones is also helpful.

Over plan – be prepared with enough activities so that you can adjust tasks to suit daily fluctuations in the person’s functioning.

Task – try dividing tasks into smaller parts, each of which can be treated as a complete task. Activities are easier to accomplish one step at a time. For support please contact the BIA in your state (go to www.biausa.org). The process of controlling the environment is draining on family members, and getting support can be very helpful in maintaining your efforts.

References

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