

Impulsivity

Injury to the frontal lobes can affect the area of the brain that normally controls our impulses.

This inability to control urges can lead to impulsive and often inappropriate social behavior. For example a previously shy person may become quite extroverted and talkative if the brain injury has led to mild disinhibition. When this inability to control urges is more marked it may lead to a normally reserved polite person making crude or sexually inappropriate comments to strangers following a brain injury.

When other people do not understand the reasons for this behavior it often leads to rejection and criticism from others. Impulsivity can therefore lead to social isolation as the person alienates existing friendships and cannot make new ones. Other inappropriate behaviors may include:

- Sexual promiscuity
- Acting without thinking
- Inability to save money or regulate finances
- Sharing personal details inappropriately
- Irritability
- Temper outbursts
- Too familiar with strangers
- Asking personal questions of others despite their discomfort.

LACK OF INSIGHT

Another common outcome from a frontal lobe injury is lack of awareness where it is difficult to analyze one's own behavior or to gauge other people's reactions. This complicates the issue of impulsivity as the person may refuse to acknowledge that they have inappropriate behavior. They may be unable to understand their own limitations or the consequences of their actions. A person lacking in insight will also be unable to understand other people's behavior or motives, unable to empathize or imagine how someone else is feeling.

STRATEGIES FOR CAREGIVERS

Impulsivity often arises in situations where the person is confused or fearful. These can be minimized by a predictable daily schedule which will reduce outbursts. Also any outbursts should not be automatically written off as impulsivity and ignored. It may be indicating a cause of fear or confusion that needs to be dealt with.

When lack of awareness is not an issue the person may apologize later. Try to be sensitive to this despite any lingering anger or annoyance on your part. Prolonged

complaints about the behavior afterward are not likely to help as usually their lack of control was not by choice on their part.

If the person engages in attention seeking behavior such as yelling or interrupting, tell them this is not a good way to get your attention and advise on an alternative strategy.

One of the most difficult strategies on handling impulsivity is to recognize that any challenging behaviors have arisen from a physiological cause- the frontal lobe injury.

Try to remember it is the impulsivity that is at fault, not your loved one. Generally they will not be speaking or acting intentionally to annoy you or hurt your feelings. Separating the person from the behavior can go a long way to coping with the situation.

In serious cases your local Brain Injury Association will be able to put you in touch with any specialists in behavioral issues who may exist in your area. Also in some cases medication may play a useful role. You should consult your rehabilitation specialist or doctor to see if it could help you.

This is one of over 100 fact sheets on brain injury available at www.biaq.com.au/facts.htm , reprinted with the permission of Brain Injury Association of Queensland and provided here by the Brain Injury Association of Virginia.

This article is provided by the Brain Injury Association of Virginia (BIAV) and is for informational and educational purposes only. The information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical or psychological advice, diagnosis or treatment, and you should not use the information in place of the advice of your physician or other healthcare provider.

For more information about brain injury or services and resources in Virginia, please contact the Brain Injury Association of Virginia (BIAV): Toll-free Help-line: (800) 444-6443 ♦ E- mail: info@biav.net ♦ Website: www.biav.net