

Educating Families About Behavioral Changes Following TBI

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Video Link: <http://www.brainline.org/content/multimedia.php?id=1429>

Caron Gan: Well with respect to behavioral changes, I start with education about why the person may be behaving the way they are and to explore with the family around some of the situations that may trigger some of the anger or frustration. So, for example, if the person is very overwhelmed has difficulty filtering out lots of noise and lots of stimuli in the environment just changing the environment and making things quieter may help to reduce that level of frustration so that would be something fairly simple that families can do just purely through education and modifying the environment.

Now sometimes we know that anger can come out of nowhere when someone's had a brain injury. And in those situations it is really important to help families learn calming strategies, not to talk back, not to argue back, which will just escalate the anger and instead learn exit strategies, time out, learn ways of calming, stepping back, but then coming back to talk about things when things are calmer.

Sometimes it may be just modifying the communication style because we know that people with brain injuries may have more difficulty processing information families my learn to, may need to learn how to be short and sweet in their messages, not to over talk, not to use complex long sentences and to keep things simple and that makes it a lot easier and less frustrating for the person with a brain injury.

With respect to mood changes, we know that both the person with a brain injury as well as the family member experiences a real sense of loss so the person with a brain injury may be going through a grief reaction and it's not uncommon for people to experience sadness, anger, despair like the same kinds of reactions that people go through when they've lost a loved one and the person with a brain injury also goes through those same kinds of feelings and so that needs to be acknowledged by the family, by people around them and sometimes family members in their good intent to be helpful try to pull the person with a brain injury away from those feelings rather than sit with them and support them and help them normalize that this is okay and giving permission to grieve.

So that's an important component of dealing with some of the mood changes because it may be a grief reaction that they need permission to experience and to express and to go through.

Now we also know that after a brain injury people are more vulnerable to experiencing mood changes such as depression. So it would be important to make sure that it's not a clinical depression and to assess for that, and you know, help the family consider or help the individual consider whether or not they want to engage in counseling to deal with their depressed mood.