

Behavior

Behavioral challenges, including problems with social skills and interactions with others, are some of the most challenging symptoms for caregivers to manage after a brain injury. Aggression toward others, self-injury, property destruction, yelling and cursing, or doing inappropriate things may lead to serious concerns and stress on families. Oftentimes, behavior problems are the result of challenges with processing information or understanding situations correctly. Early on, some people may experience a period of anger or agitation. While this may be concerning, it is generally a sign that the brain is healing. It usually goes away as the brain begins to heal. However, if difficulties with processing or understanding situations continue, agitation can remain.

Your loved one may not understand the changes that have occurred and may make statements like, "I'm fine," or "My memory is fine." Part of the brain injury journey is helping your loved one understand the effects of the injury. These effects may include the inability to recognize changes in one's skills and capacity, or problems with self-awareness.

These issues can result in impaired judgment, compromised safety due to unrealistic goals, and decreased motivation to work on problem areas.

Tips for families

Practice self-care

- ✓ Take care of yourself, being a caregiver is hard.
 - Get enough sleep.
 - Eat well.
 - Exercise (even if that means just taking short walks).
 - Ask for and accept help from others.

Use behavioral strategies

- ✓ Try to remain calm and avoid arguing with your loved one if they become angry or agitated.
- ✓ Let them try things and make mistakes.
- ✓ Redirect your loved one's attention to something else if they become agitated.

Look for ways to lower stress

- ✓ Do deep breathing exercises with your loved one.
- ✓ Provide a place for your loved one to take quiet rest breaks as needed.
- ✓ Encourage your loved one to talk about their feelings.

Ask for help

- ✓ Request help from your loved one's medical team on how to handle outbursts and challenging behaviors.
- ✓ Be sure to update your loved one's medical team on symptoms that get worse.
- ✓ Report any safety concerns to the medical team right away.

Check out additional resources from BIAA

- ✓ *Coping With Behavior Problems After Brain Injury* by Claude Munday, PhD, William Lynch, PhD, John Haller, and Carol Welsh, MPA, CBIS. <https://biausa.org/public-affairs/media/coping-with-behavior-problems-after-brain-injury>
- ✓ *Behavioral Issues After a Brain Injury: Strategies for Families*, a webinar by Chrystal Fullen, PsyD, as part of BIAA's Carolyn Rocchio Caregiver webinar series. <https://biausa.org/public-affairs/media/behavioral-issues-following-brain-injury-strategies-for-families>