

Anger and Agitation

Agitation is a loss of control over one's behavior. It often occurs in response to frustration or overstimulation. In a person with brain injury, agitation may represent an overreaction to even minor frustration. There are often identifiable factors that cause the agitation.

Determining what these factors are will provide clues on how to minimize or avoid agitation in the future.

Example 1

In the course of getting dressed for a family gathering, Sam noticed a large stain on his pants. He became very angry with his wife for not having his pants cleaned. He started cursing loudly and pacing around the room. Finally, he threw his pants across the room and kicked the bedpost. Sam was mumbling under his breath about how things never go his way. He would not put on other pants to go to the gathering; instead, he stayed mad all day.

Example 2

During supper at a restaurant, Mary had trouble getting her pasta on a fork. She tried a second time, but the food slipped off the fork. She became very frustrated and yelled out to the other customers in the restaurant, "What are you looking at?" Mary then began eating with her hands.

Tips for Preventing Agitation

- Give simple directions to tasks.
- Offer tasks within the person's general abilities to limit frustration.
- Follow a schedule suggested by the rehabilitation team, including rest times.
- Limit visitors to 2-3 people at a time for shorter visits (~30 minutes) until better control of behavior is established.
- Allow the person to have some "space."
- Avoid noisy places with large crowds.
- Keep household noise level to a minimum (avoid multiple noise sources at one time - TV, radio, video games, etc.)

Ways to Help

- Speak softly and calmly.
- Maintain a safe distance.
- Ignore the behavior if it is safe to do so.
- Direct attention away from the cause of agitation (change the subject).
- Eliminate extra noise in the surrounding area if possible (TVs, radios, noisy guests).
- Direct the person away from crowds to a more quiet area.
- Show support by acknowledging his/her frustration. **Say:** "I know this has really upset you."
- Do not challenge, confront or scold the person. **Do not say:** "Stop it. You're acting like a fool."

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- Remove dangerous items that may be used as weapons.
- Never leave a confused or agitated person alone. Keep them in sight but at a safe distance.
- If possible, let a physically aggressive person move freely in a safe, large space. Avoid trying to restrain or touch.
- Get help if the person is a danger to himself or others (ask someone nearby to call, if necessary).
- If circumstances warrant, inform the doctor / health care provider.

The ABC behavior worksheet is a way to keep track of problem behaviors. To help a person better control or change behavior, it is important to know what events **lead up (A = Antecedent)** to the **behavior (B = Behavior)** and what happens as a **result (C = Consequence)** of the behavior.

An example of the **ABC Behavior Worksheet** can be printed as a tool.