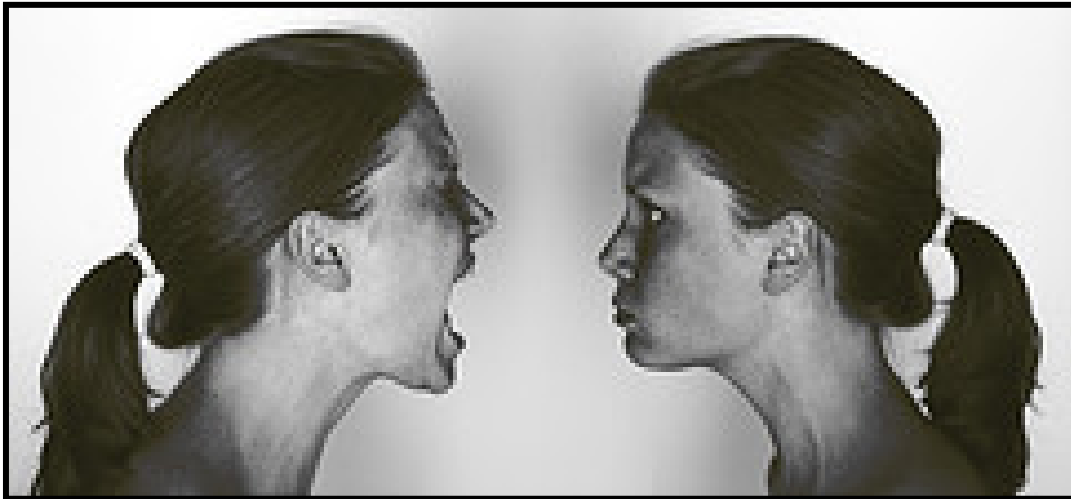


Rehab TIP SHEET #7

Managing Irritability and Temper Following Brain Injury

For individuals with a head injury to the frontal areas of the brain, anger and irritability may occur more frequently when compared to the average person. The reason is because the damage to the brain results in individuals being unable to hold back their emotional and verbal responses. Temper outbursts often occur unpredictably in response to some type of minor event that may make the individual angry one day but not the next day. The anger tends to escalate very rapidly and may be directed at a person, such as a family member, or some object, such as slamming a door. On a positive note, the anger rarely escalates into violence such as hitting, throwing things, or breaking things unless the individual had a history of such outbursts prior to brain injury. After a few minutes of looking intense and perhaps raising his/her voice, the individual usually calms down.

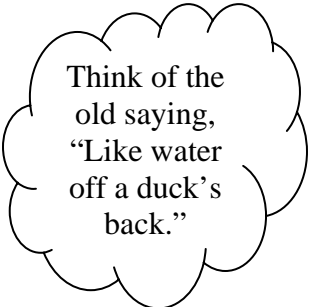
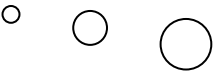


Managing temper outbursts can be challenging for caregivers of individuals with brain injury. When most people become angry, they are able to control their anger or “keep it inside.” However, many individuals with TBI lack self control. As a caregiver, the most important information to keep in mind is that you cannot control someone else’s behavior. You can only control your own behavior and allow others to control their behavior. You are also not going to prevent individuals with TBI from becoming irritable or angry, but you can help to lessen the frequency and intensity of outbursts.

Helpful suggestions for managing emotional outbursts.

1. If possible, have several caregivers who can take turns being with the individual with TBI.
One’s ability to deal with behavior problems is better if rested and taking regular breaks.

2. Remain calm when the individual becomes irritable or angry. If the caregiver becomes agitated, it can increase the agitation of the person with head injury.
3. Don't take personally anything the person who is injured says in anger.
4. Never attempt to reason or argue with a person who is angry. The person may not be thinking clearly, so it does not make sense to reason with him/her. Wait until the person has calmed and then talk.
5. Speak clearly and in a normal voice to change the topic of what you are talking about or redirect the person's attention to something else.



Think of the old saying, "Like water off a duck's back."



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6. Tell the person you need a break and leave the person alone for a few minutes by going to another room or outside. Usually temper will decrease after a few minutes when there is no one there. When you return, talk in a calm voice and try to discuss the temper problem. Point out other ways the person could have reacted to the situation.
7. Do not reinforce negative behaviors, such as temper outbursts, by giving the person more attention. It is better to withdraw attention, even to the point of not looking at the person. This is another reason that leaving the person alone is often helpful.
8. Be sure to reinforce good behavior. When the injured person is calm, give them attention and praise them. Make these times enjoyable for both of you.
9. Although rare, sometimes a person with head injury is a danger to himself or others when angry. They may threaten to hurt themselves or others. Rarely, they cause harm. In this situation, protect yourself. Leave the person and call the police or take the person to a local emergency room for an evaluation.



10. Never give a person with a head injury any alcohol or medications that have not been prescribed in order to calm the person. This is dangerous.