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Managing Anger – Tips for Families, Friends and Carers

Introduction

Anger can be a particular problem for people after a brain injury. It can lead to unpredictable behaviour, which can be destructive and aggressive. While some people with a brain injury feel at the mercy of this powerful emotion, others barely notice its presence or impact.

It can be very hard when you are on the receiving end of someone's anger. It is often directed at those closest to us and it can be particularly hurtful if it is directed at friends, family members and carers.

This factsheet provides some strategies that should help you to deal with a brain injury survivor's anger.

What can help?

- You may feel you already know what 'triggers' their anger. However, rather than tell them what to do or what to avoid, help them discover it for themselves.
- Design some experiments (or do some tests) with them, and ask them to rate their anger on a scale of 1 - 10 when they are close to possible triggers, e.g. loud noise.
- When you both discover a trigger, help them find another way to look at the situation. Suggest to them that rather than saying:

"Why have you got that TV on so loud, you are so selfish",

it's better to try:

"Please could you turn it down a bit, the noise bothers me."
- Agree on a prompt or sign that you can use when you believe that they are getting angry. For example, you could blow over your shoulder, indicating "blow away your anger", to prompt them that they need to calm down.
- Busy places can be difficult for someone with a brain injury, as it can be difficult to process all the information. If you see them getting angry in such a situation, encourage them to move away to somewhere quieter.

factsheet

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- If the person is getting angry try to direct their attention away from the cause.
- You may not always know what is making them angry. You will need patience to work out what triggers the anger. Even simple things like watching people chatting freely can bring up feelings of sadness and injustice.
- Recommend that your friend or relative looks through the Headway factsheet *Managing Anger after Brain Injury – Tips for Brain Injury Survivors*. You could work through the factsheet with them and help them to use the suggested strategies.
- Think about strategies to help yourself. If they have had a bad day, and they dump their anger on to you, you can think of your own coping statements such as:

“That felt very hurtful, but I know you didn’t mean it that way”.

“What’s this about? You must be feeling in a bad state to be that rude to me”.

Conclusion

Remember, it is often easier to take anger out on those closest to us and on whom we rely the most. For this reason it is important to try not to take it too personally when your friend or relative gets angry with you.

Managing anger is not about taking it away it is about giving control and choice. Anger is a perfectly natural emotion and can be necessary in order to provide a serious message and to deal with serious situations.

To discuss any issues raised in this factsheet or to find details of our local Groups and Branches, please contact the Headway helpline free of charge on 0808 800 2244 or by email at helpline@headway.org.uk. You can also find more information and contact details of Groups and Branches on our website at www.headway.org.uk.

This factsheet is adapted from the Headway booklet *Managing Anger after Brain Injury*, which contains more detailed information. To order this or any other Headway booklets contact us on 0115 924 0800 or visit our website at www.headway.org.uk. Our factsheets are available to download free of charge from the website and copies can also be ordered from the Helpline.

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