



# Brain Injury Symptoms & Strategies

**This tip card helps survivors,  
families, and professionals...**

- Recognize common signs and symptoms
- Use strategies to improve communication and daily functioning



**Brain Injury  
Alliance**  
COLORADO



**MINDSOURCE**  
BRAIN INJURY NETWORK



# What is considered a brain injury?

An Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) is any type of damage to the brain acquired after birth and which is not hereditary, congenital, or degenerative. Causes of ABI include external forces applied to the head and or neck (traumatic brain injury), anoxic/hypoxic injury (cardiac arrest, airway obstruction, hemorrhage, drowning), intracranial surgery, infectious diseases, toxic exposure (carbon monoxide poisoning), aneurysms, and vascular obstruction (stroke).

**Brain injury can cause a wide range of functional short- or long-term changes affecting thinking, sensation, language, or emotions<sup>2</sup>.**

- 1. Thinking** (i.e., memory, reasoning, processing speed, attention)
- 2. Sensation** (i.e., sensitivity to light or noise, touch, taste, and smell)
- 3. Language** (i.e., communication, expression, and understanding)
- 4. Emotion** (i.e., depression, anxiety, personality changes, aggression, acting out, and social inappropriateness).

## **Common areas of impairment:**

- Short-term memory
- Processing speed
- Attention
- Emotional regulation
- Light or noise sensitivity

# Now What?

Fortunately, there are simple techniques for survivors, loved-ones, and professionals to build into daily life be more successful and building skills to compensate for their brain injury deficits.

Here are some common areas of impairment and simple accommodations:

## Attention

**Might look like:** Fidgeting, squirming, getting off topic

### TIPS

Reduce distractions • Keep instructions brief • Work on one thing at a time

## Delayed Processing Speed

**Might look like:** Appearing confused, slow to respond, not following instructions

### TIPS

Additional time to review information  
• Speak slowly, clearly • Check for understanding

## Short Term Memory

**Might look like:** Can't remember details, disorganized, appears manipulative

### TIPS

Provide written reminders of appointments, instructions • Stick to routine • Summarize discussions about expectations and remind for next steps

## Sensory Motor Skills

**Might look like:** Appearing overwhelmed, emotional melt down, irritable

### TIPS

Meet in quiet, calm environment • Schedule breaks • Encourage rest, hydration, nutrition, • Rescheduling if sick or overly stressed

## Language (Social Pragmatics):

**Might look like:** Inappropriate body language, get in your space, over sharing

### TIPS

Direct and concrete feedback • Role play to improve behaviors • Do not rely on body language

## Language (Receptive)

**Might look like:** Withdrawal, appearing confused, struggle with abstract language

### TIPS

Allow extra time to process • Ask if needed to repeat or rephrase • Instruct slowly and with one direction at a time

## Expressive Language

**Might look like:** Not staying on topic, immature speech, lack of social etiquette

### TIPS

Be patient • Compassionately give feedback • Allow extra time for them to respond

## Initiation

**Might look like:** Appears unmotivated, needs constant cueing, follower

### TIPS

Provide small, tangible steps • Help get started • Encourage checklists and calendars

## Mental Flexibility

**Might look like:** Perseverating, appear stubborn or argumentative, resistant

### TIPS

Provide respectful feedback • Prepare for transitions • Assist developing alternative plans

## Reasoning

**Might look like:** Concrete thinking, difficulty learning from past experiences, struggles with open ended questions

### TIPS

Teach step by step problem solving  
• Point out possible consequences, outcomes • Speak concretely

## Emotional/Behavioral

**Might look like:** Argumentative, melt down, over or under reaction to events

### TIPS

Model, practice positive interactions • Suggest breaks when appearing overwhelmed  
• Encourage mindfulness behaviors, exercises

## Activities to Encourage

- Mindfulness
- Yoga
- Support Groups
- Journaling
- Exercise
- Adequate rest
- Good nutrition



**Note:** *This pamphlet is not intended to be exhaustive of all compensation and accommodation techniques. It is a snapshot that contains easy to implement options.*

## Resources

### **Brain Injury Alliance of Colorado**

(303) 355-9969

BIAColorado.org

### **BrainLine.org**

### **COKidsWithBrainInjury.com**

## References

1. <https://ws.edu/student-services/disability/teaching/brain.shtm>
2. <https://www.neuroskills.com/brain-injury/brain-injury-overview/traumatic-brain-injury-recovery/>



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