

Emotional and Behavioural Changes After Brain Injury Grief & Loss

QUICK FACTS

- Grief is a natural response to any type of loss and is often experienced following a brain injury
- The grieving process is unique to each individual and it can be sad, scary, lonely, frustrating and confusing for the whole family
- Feelings of grief and loss may be strong, overwhelming and confusing
- Feelings are often unpredictable and can change quickly

WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE?

- Frequent referral to the person they were before / the life they lived before the injury
- Ignoring the skills and abilities that remain
- A drastic change in personality
- Denial, anger, and sadness at the losses which have occurred
- Crying spells, low energy, and restlessness
- Feelings of guilt and worthlessness
- Easily upset when unable to complete tasks as they once did before
- Not enjoying things like before
- Isolation, withdrawal
- Over-eating and under-eating
- Unpredictable reactions (i.e. can be angry outbursts) that may occur at home, the workplace, and community
- Poor outlook on life and questioning the quality of their current life
- There are many losses that may be experienced following brain injury, these may include the following:
 - Abilities – physical, cognitive, emotional and social
 - Lifestyle
 - Roles and relationships
 - Self-image and sense of who they are
 - Hopes and plans for the future

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE CAUSES AND COMPLICATIONS?

Possible complications:

- The person can become discouraged as they do not understand what their abilities and challenges will be long-term
- Frustration, grief, and feelings of loss are not synced with their caregiver and can create conflict
- Cognitive challenges (e.g. memory problems, concrete thinking) can make the emotional adjustment to loss and change longer
- May become depressed, isolate oneself and have feelings of hopelessness

FACT SHEET CONTINUED.



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WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Educate yourself about the grieving process and know that the individual may not follow predictable or set stages of mourning such as:
 - Denial
 - Anger
 - Bargaining
 - Depression
 - Acceptance and hope
- Provide time, support, and motivation as the individual navigates through changing emotions
- Acknowledge the loss without dwelling on it (e.g., “it must be very difficult not being able to dance like you used to.”)
- Avoid trivializing the loss (e.g., “if you think you have it bad, I knew someone who—“)
- Avoid reasoning away the loss (e.g., “you may not be able to play hockey, but at least you can walk.”)
- Promote an awareness of the individual's successes and strengths
- Frequently use encouragement and positive reinforcements
- Assess and monitor activities that can trigger feelings of grief and loss
- Select activities to increase the likelihood of a positive experience
- Seek counselling and support within your community for your loved one and yourself

Disclaimer: This information is not meant to replace advice from a medical doctor. Consult a health care provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatment.