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## Disinhibition after ABI

This is a section about being disinhibited. Remember, not all of it will apply to everyone who has an ABI. Just read whatever you need to know. This section will tell you about:

- **What is disinhibition?**
- **What are the signs of disinhibition?**
- **What can be done about disinhibition?**
- **Where can I find out more about disinhibition?**

### What is Disinhibition?

Hurting the frontal lobe of the brain can damage our sense of inhibition. Inhibition makes us think twice before we do something. Sometimes, saying what we really think or doing what we want can be hurtful to others or can get us into trouble or situations we would rather not be in. Hurting your frontal lobe can sometimes stop us from thinking twice. This is called 'disinhibition'.

It is important to remember that no-one is disinhibited on purpose. In an ideal world no-one would hurt their head and this wouldn't be a problem.

Disinhibition can be a bit of shock for friends and family. If you had broken your leg everyone would see the plaster cast and know that you had broken your leg. Because no-one can see that your brain is hurt, it can be a shock when you do things that might be a little out of character.

Disinhibition does not affect everyone. Because there can be such a change, usually your family and friends will notice so that something can be done to help you.

No-one knows how many people are affected with disinhibition after a head injury, but you are not alone. Many people experience this problem when they try and adjust back into their old life.

Below are some of the problems that disinhibition may cause. Remember, not all of them will affect you. Sometimes there can be very small changes so that you aren't really that aware you are different. It is also important to remember, if you do have any of these, that no-one is going to blame you. Some people may be a bit puzzled





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but those who care for you will know that is just part of you trying to adjust after an ABI.

## What are the signs of disinhibition?

- **Short attention span.**

You may get bored easy and you won't mind saying so. Before you became disinhibited maybe you just carried on with what you had been asked to do, you were still bored but did not do anything about it.

- **Frustration.**

Maybe you find schoolwork hard and have problems understanding what you have been asked to do. You may become very angry and upset with people where previously you may have asked the teacher for some help.

- **Losing your 'get up and go' called 'initiative'.**

You might find it hard to predict what people expect of you or when they expect you to do it. You might need clear instructions before you do anything where as before you did things without being told.

- **Wanting to have things your own way all the time.**

Maybe you were like this before you hurt your head! This is sometimes called being 'inflexible'. It means that you don't want to discuss anything, you just want things your own way and aren't prepared to change your mind or negotiate.

- **Not thinking things through or 'being impulsive'.**

We all get the urge to do something sometimes that, in a split second, we think about and decided is a bad idea. Disinhibition can stop you from doing this and this impulsiveness can get you into all sorts of trouble or even put you in danger.

- **Increased irritability.**

Life can annoy everyone sometimes but if you feel disinhibited you may get annoyed much more easily. You will probably end up telling whoever is annoying you about it too! You may find yourself getting into arguments more often and this can be very upsetting.

- **Temper tantrums.**

Maybe you lose you temper much more often. This is also to do with feeling irritable and being inflexible.





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- **Feeling tired, called 'Fatigue'.**

Perhaps you find it hard to stay awake. Maybe you will fall asleep in lessons, where as before, you tried to keep yourself awake.

- **Being argumentative.**

You may find that you don't agree with people and tell them this very directly.

- **Socially inappropriate behaviour.**

This can be very upsetting. It is when you do things that can be really offensive to other people in public. This could be throwing a big temper tantrum and starting fights or doing things on impulse that put other people in danger.

- **Sexually inappropriate behaviour.**

Masturbation in public is never acceptable, nor is touching someone in sexually who does not want to be touched in that way. Disinhibition can sometimes cause problems with sexual boundaries. If this is a problem hopefully someone will tell you and help you as soon as possible.

If an adult or another young person ever makes you feel uncomfortable by acting in a sexual way towards you it is important to tell someone. Sometimes, adults can try to take advantage of you sexually. It is important that you tell someone you trust if this happens to you, or call Childline: 0800 1111 and they will give you advice on what to do.

- **Making friends and socialising.**

Disinhibition prevents you from interacting with people the way you normally would. Before hurting your head you may have found it easy to make friends; this is because we learn to make friends from a very early age by being nice and doing things to make others like us. Disinhibition can stop you from doing this. People may then not react to you in the same way and might not want to be your friend.

- **Drugs and alcohol.**

Disinhibition can affect your judgement. This may lead to you drinking too much alcohol or taking drugs that you would not take normally. Alcohol also affects the brain so if you have hurt your brain, the effects of alcohol can be much greater. Being drunk or 'out of it' on drugs can lead to you getting into all sorts of trouble and you may put yourself in danger. You may also be more likely to hurt your head again, which could cause bigger problems.





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## What can be done about disinhibition?

Disinhibition can be very upsetting to many people and schools should look at helping children with ABI who are disinhibited.

One method is called 'positive consequences'. This is when your teacher or support worker helps you to recognise what is good behaviour and what is not. It can take some time to work and you may need to be patient, but this method has been shown to help people learn to control their behaviour after an ABI.

Another method is called 'prevention'. This is when your teacher or support worker helps you to not put yourself in situations that your disinhibition may cause problems in. This can take some time too, and there are lots of different ways that you can be helped with this.

You will find that when you go back to school you may have to speak to lots of people who will ask you lots of questions to see how they can help you. An educational psychologist looks at the best ways to help you with schoolwork and they will also be looking out for signs of disinhibition and ways to help you.

You may find that your disinhibition improves over time, or at least your ability to deal with it will. There will still be the support you need from teachers and support workers to make sure that your disinhibition stays in control. You may be able to find ways that help you too so try not to get down about it.

Remember, there are lots of people who want to help you, including your friends, family and school teachers!

## Where can I find out more about disinhibition?

If you are a parent or teacher of a child who has an ABI and are finding it difficult to cope with their change in behaviour following the injury, try talking to your school's educational psychologist who will have some strategies to help. This book could be of help to you:

WALKER, S. & WICKS, B. (2005) Educating Children with Acquired Brain Injury. London: David Fulton Publishers.

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