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## Coping with labelling after ABI

This is a big deal to a lot of people. It is bad enough you had to go through all of that upset hurting your head, now it seems that it is all people want to talk about.

Labelling means being called a name or being given a name that describes something about you. This can sometimes be good and sometimes bad. It often depends on who is talking to you and what they say.

When a doctor gives you a name for your condition like 'epilepsy' or 'ataxia', this is known as a 'diagnosis' and is a bit different. It allows people to know what your medical problems are.

When you get called bad names and people say you are 'special', 'a bit thick', or a 'spaz,' those labels are very hurtful. Calling people nasty names because they are different or disabled is a kind of bullying and you should tell a teacher if it happens to you in school.

Hopefully we can give you some tips on what to do.

## Why do people label me?

Labelling is something that everyone will do from time to time. It is our way of putting something into words that we don't really understand. By giving someone a 'label' we can identify what it is about people that we don't understand.

Maybe life has changed a lot since your ABI and you now do things that you never used to, or maybe you can't concentrate, walk funny or have slurred speech.

If you do any of these things, people will look at you and notice that you are different. Some people have enough sense to keep quiet and say nothing at all. Other people aren't so clever and tell you about it in a way that upsets you.

Your problems are very individual to you and it is hard for anyone to understand how it has affected you. When they look at you they just don't get it and they might say things out loud as they try and figure it all out.





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The problem is, those things aren't very nice to hear and sometimes you just want to shout at them!

## I am not a brain injury on legs!

After you hurt your head it seems that is all that anyone wants to talk about. When you are in hospital you have lots of people talking about your brain injury and telling you about what it means, and when you get back to school everyone wants to know what happened and how your brain injury affects you.

It can feel like people are obsessed with your brain injury. Then it can feel that all of your other health problems like epilepsy or ataxia become really important to everyone too. It can start to feel that everything about you is being labelled and that people have forgotten about the real you and all the other things you can do. You just want to scream out: 'What about me! I am not a brain injury on legs!'

## What to do

Here is a good thing to try. When someone calls you something or gives you a 'label', try and think about why they said that to you:

Were they being kind?

Were they being horrible?

Were they being curious?

Were they being nosy?

Were they trying to help?

Were they trying to upset you?

Is it because they don't understand what happened to me?

When you have thought about those kind of questions it can help you decide what to do.





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## What do I do when someone is labelling me in a bad way?

If you feel you are being labelled in a bad way you should really talk to an adult about it. Try your teachers, parents or support worker. They will be able to help you sort it out or perhaps stop the person who is calling you names from doing it.

Maybe ask your teacher to talk to the other people in your class and explain what has happened to you. They won't be so quick to poke fun when they see how your ABI has affected you.

Have a look at our section on bullying too. Try to remember that often people don't actually mean you harm. Sometimes people just blurt things out in the heat of the moment then regret ever saying it. Sometimes people say stupid things because they are embarrassed and don't know what else to say. They would probably be very upset to know they hurt your feelings.

More importantly, there is a fine line between 'labelling' and 'being bullied'. If you have any doubts, you should talk to an adult.

## Doctors and nurses driving you mad?

Sometimes, doctors and nurses get a bit carried away with the medical stuff and forget to talk to you as a person! It can get a bit boring listening to a doctor talk about 'your brain injury' like it is a pet dog or something. If you are tired of doctors and nurses labelling you, just tell them politely. They will be glad you did and might even thank you for it!

