



Managing anger after brain injury - tips for families, friends and carers

Headway's publications are all available to freely download from the [information library](#) on the charity's website, while individuals and families can request hard copies of the booklets via the [helpline](#).

Please help us to continue to provide free information to people affected by brain injury by making a donation at www.headway.org.uk/donate. Thank you.

Introduction

Witnessing someone having an outburst of anger, or being on the receiving end of someone's anger can be very hard. It can be particularly hurtful if the anger is directed at family members, who are already upset and perhaps angry themselves.

This factsheet contains tips for the family, friends and carers of a brain injury survivor who experiences more anger after their brain injury and has difficulties with managing this. The information has been taken from the Headway booklet *Managing anger after brain injury*, which is available on the Headway website at www.headway.org.uk/information-library.

Tips for families, friends and carers

- Try not to get into an argument with the brain injury survivor. Instead, make a conscious effort to be calm and speak to them gently, even if you think they are wrong. Tell them that you can see they are starting to get angry, and remind them to take deep breaths to calm themselves down.
- Remove yourself from the area if the anger is being directed at you. Explain to the brain injury survivor that you are leaving because you think it will help them to calm down, rather than just walking away.
- Remember that even if the anger is being directed at you, this is not personal. Rather, it is a common effect of brain injury.
- Try to gently direct the brain injury survivor's attention away from the cause of their anger.
- You may feel you already know what 'triggers' their anger. However, rather than tell them what to do or what to avoid, help them to discover it for themselves.
- When you both discover a trigger, help them with finding 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 is better to try, "please could you turn it down a bit? The noise bothers me".
- The cause of their anger may not always be obvious. Therefore, you will need to be patient and observant at times in order to work it out. Even simple things like watching people chatting freely can bring up feelings of sadness and injustice, which can subsequently lead to anger.
- Ask them to rate their anger on a scale when they are close to possible triggers.



More information on measuring anger on a scale is available in the Headway booklet *Managing anger after brain injury*.

- Agree on a prompt or sign that you can use when you believe they are getting wound up. For example, you could blow over your shoulder, indicating 'blow away your anger', to prompt them that they need to calm themselves.
- Busy places can be difficult for brain injury survivors as they may struggle with processing all of the information around them. If you see them getting 'worked up', encourage them to move to somewhere quieter.

Seeking professional support

Sometimes it is necessary for a brain injury survivor who has anger problems to seek professional support. More information on this is available in the Headway booklet *Managing anger after brain injury*. However, whether a brain injury survivor seeks professional support or not depends on whether they recognise that there is an issue.

If they do not recognise that they have an anger problem, it is important to try to help them to understand by giving gentle but constant reminders and reassurance that there is help available. Discuss with them the benefits of getting professional support, and remind them that they are not to blame for their anger problem, it is an effect of their injury.

If the brain injury survivor still refuses to seek professional support, it can be useful for you to attend therapy or counselling sessions alone. You may be able to discuss with the therapist how the survivor's anger makes you feel and how best to look after yourself.

Remember that it is important to protect yourself and anyone else around you if the anger becomes violent. If the brain injury survivor becomes abusive and is at risk of harming themselves or others around them, there may be a need to report this to an adult safeguarding team. The Headway helpline can offer emotional support and information if you need help with this.

Conclusion

Problems with managing anger are common after brain injury. For many brain injury survivors with anger problems, becoming aware of the anger is the first step to managing it. Families, friends and carers are often also affected by anger problems, and it is important for them to be aware of how best to support the brain injury survivor with managing this.

If you would like to discuss any of the issues raised in this factsheet, or are seeking emotional support, contact the Headway helpline on 0808 800 2244 or helpline@headway.org.uk.

Factsheet first published 2010. Last reviewed 2016. Next review 2019.