

Alcohol related brain injury – communication

Alcohol related brain injury is associated with a change in thinking and memory abilities. It affects the way people learn and understand new information and how they communicate with others. You can help people with alcohol related brain injury improve their communication skills by keeping the discussion focused and checking that they have understood what has been discussed.

Keeping the conversation focused

People with alcohol related brain injury often have difficulty with focusing on a topic of conversation. They can be easily distracted by less relevant points of discussion and wander off in other directions. You can get them back on track by:

- Reminding them of the conversation topic
- Redirecting the conversation by repeating a question
- Using a pencil and paper to focus discussion.

Communicating effectively

Keep the following points in mind when giving instructions or information:

- Use concrete and familiar terms
- Break down information into small important points
- Slow down when you talk
- Focus discussion on one topic at a time.

Beware of assuming people with alcohol related brain injury are understanding and remembering what is being discussed. Some people may nod their head and say they understand when in reality they don't. It is a good idea to check their understanding and retention of information by asking the person to repeat what you said in their own words.

Dealing with memory and retrieval problems

Many people with memory problems related to alcohol related brain injury respond best to closed rather than open ended questions. That is, it is easier to respond to questions where they can provide a 'yes' or 'no' answer. For example, instead of asking, 'What did you do today?' ask, 'Did you go out today?' Communication can also be improved by providing cues or prompts to trigger memory.

Consider how you appear to the person

When you are trying to communicate clearly and get a message across it is important to consider how you appear to that person. The person with alcohol related brain injury needs to feel comfortable with you and feel that you understand their needs and frustrations. You should aim to be non-threatening and non-judgmental.

Where to get help

- ARBIAS - acquired brain injury services specialising in alcohol and substance related brain injury Tel. (03) 9417 7071
- Your regional Department of Human Services.

Things to remember

- Keep conversations focused and on track.
- Give prompts or cues to trigger memory.
- Check understanding of information by asking the person to repeat what you said in their own words.
- Be non-threatening and non-judgmental.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by ARBIAS. The Better Health Channel is part of the Department of Human Services, Victoria.

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