



Brain Injury  
Association  
of New Jersey

825 Georges Road, 2nd Floor  
North Brunswick, NJ 08902  
Phone: (732) 745-0200  
Helpline: 1-800-669-4323  
E-mail: [info@bianj.org](mailto:info@bianj.org)  
Website: [www.bianj.org](http://www.bianj.org)

## Tips for Successful Communication

Brain injury often results in various degrees of disability in cognitive, social, emotional, and physical functioning. Whether you are a family member, friend, or professional in a relationship with a person with a brain injury, it is always important to remember that a person with a brain injury is an individual with interests, hobbies, likes and dislikes. The disability is a part of who the person is, but it alone does not define that person.

**The following are a few basic tips to remember when communicating with a person with a brain injury or any other disability:**

- Treat adults like adults
- Ask before you help.
- Wheelchairs are a part of a person's personal space. Do not push or touch a person's wheelchair without first asking.
- Make sure your non-verbal message matches your verbal message.
- Never anticipate another's response by answering for them. Use reflective listening.
- Emphasize abilities, not limitations.
- Keep in mind that choice and independence are important to everyone.
- Avoid excessive praise or attention, which can sometimes be recognized as patronizing.
- Certain words should always be avoided: brain damaged, handicapped person, spastic, deaf, dumb, retarded, epileptic, afflicted, victim, crazy, confined, crippled, and paralytic are some of them.

**The following chart provides some suggestions for enhancing communication between a person with a brain injury and family members, friends, and professionals.**

### Situation

**Memory:** A person may be confused or miss appointments because his or her short-term memory has been affected.

**Concentration:** A person may have difficulty concentrating and appear to be distracted or inattentive because processing information takes more time.

**Fatigue:** People with a brain injury often work very hard to accomplish daily routines and may fatigue easily.

**Impulsivity:** Difficulty with impulse control can have a very serious effect on relationships. Inappropriate touching or language can be examples of difficulty with impulse control.

**Sensory Stimulation:** Excessive noise and action can exacerbate a person's disability.

**Speech:** Speech is frequently affected when a person has a brain injury.

### Tips

Confirm engagements with a telephone call, and ask a person if they need help.

Adjust your personal speaking and listening style as needed, and be prepared to wait for a person to participate in the conversation.

Understand that this is a real consequence of the brain injury and not laziness. Some down time or a nap is helpful.

A person with a brain injury may not be aware that he or she has offended someone. Addressing inappropriate behavior is better than ignoring or excusing it.

Be aware of the environment and your own behavior. It may be necessary to move to a quieter and less distracting area.

It may be necessary to slow down your listening. If you cannot understand what a person is saying, tell him or her that you need their help to understand what he or she is saying.

