

Acquired and Traumatic Brain Injury

What is an Acquired Brain Injury?

An acquired brain injury (ABI) is a broad term that includes any brain injury that an individual acquired after birth. The term ABI is not used for those born with a brain injury or for those who have a brain injury as a result of birth. ABI does not include brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative, such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, cerebral palsy, etc. ABI does include brain damage as a result of traumatic brain injury, stroke, metabolic disturbance, infection, hypoxia, substance abuse, blood loss, electrical injuries, etc.

What is Traumatic Brain Injury?

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) can result when the head suddenly and violently hits an object, or when an object pierces the skull and enters brain tissue. Symptoms of a TBI can be mild, moderate, or severe depending on the extent of damage to the brain. A youth who has a traumatic brain injury may learn or act differently in school. TBI can cause changes in the following areas:

- Understanding words
- Processing Information
- Remembering things
- Paying attention
- Problem solving
- Thinking abstractly
- Talking
- Behavior
- Physical activities
- Seeing and/or hearing
- Learning

How common are brain injuries?

Approximately 1.4 million people receive traumatic brain injuries every year. The groups that most often receive traumatic brain injuries are newborns through age 4 and teens aged 15-19. 14 PYD mentees have a traumatic brain injury.

Characteristics of Traumatic Brain Injury include:

- Physical disabilities:
 - Problems speaking, seeing, hearing, and using their other senses
 - May have headaches and feel tired a lot
 - May have trouble with skills such as writing or drawing

- Balance and walking may be affected
- May be partly or completely paralyzed on one side of the body, or both sides
- Difficulties with thinking:
 - May have trouble with short-term memory or long-term memory
 - May have trouble concentrating and only be able to focus their attention for a short time
 - May have trouble talking and listening to others
 - May have difficulty with planning and understanding the order of events (sequencing)
- Social, behavioral, or emotional problems:
 - May include sudden changes in mood, anxiety, and depression
 - May have trouble relating to others
 - May display aggressive behavior
 - May not have much motivation or much control over their emotions

Tips for Mentors:

- Talk to your mentee's family about their specific brain injury , triggers, symptoms, and coping techniques.
- Have consistent routines - this helps your mentee know what to expect.
- Realize that your mentee may get tired quickly and let them rest if need be.
- Reduce distractions when planning activities.
- Allow time of processing information.
- Give visualizations prior to outing.
- Break down information and ask mentee if he/she has questions.
- Be patient with slow responses.
- Be flexible about expectations.
- Give directions one step at a time; set small goals as steps toward accomplishing larger ones.
- Encourage and praise progress.

Sources:

1. National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities
<http://nichcy.org/disability/specific/tbi#freq>
2. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
<http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/tbi/tbi.htm>
3. Brain Injury Online <http://www.brain-injury-online.com/acquired-brain-injury.html>
4. KidsMD Health Topics <http://www.childrenshospital.org/health-topics/conditions/head-or-brain-injury>