

Social Skills

Social skills or "social competence" relate to one's ability to focus on another person and understand that person's mood, feelings and unspoken messages.

Problems with social skills are common after brain injury and often result in isolation for the patient and the patient's family. This only compounds the losses associated with the brain injury.

Good social skills also involve behaving according to commonly accepted social rules. This includes exercising self-control when it is necessary, being courteous, waiting for a turn and using appropriate language.

Example 1

The inability to understand another's point of view may lead to saying or doing something inappropriate for the situation. Others who are not aware of the person's brain injury may react negatively and even inappropriately.

For example, if a person is telling about a recent death in the family and the injured person laughs, it could result in anger and/or sadness for the person whose loved one has died.

Example 2

Another example of good social skills is participating appropriately in a conversation.

A person with a brain injury may not take turns talking or may not follow the topic of the conversation.

There are strategies that can be learned to improve social skills. For example, a person with a brain injury can be taught to listen actively through repetition, to identify facial expressions of emotions, and to avoid interrupting the person who is speaking.

Coping with Social Situations

Begin socializing with familiar people such as your family or very close friends who understand about your brain injury. Socialize in small groups at first until you see improvements in your memory and ability to interpret other people's emotions in conversation.

Balance social situations with quiet time. When several people wish to visit you at the same time, encourage **small, brief** gatherings instead, especially at first.

Avoid becoming fatigued by too much social activity. If you get tired, you may find that you begin to think less clearly. This is when you are more likely to do or say something that is not appropriate.

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Socialize with people you are comfortable with, people with whom you can relax. It can be stressful to be "correct" in a room full of strangers. As you recover, your social skills may also improve. Just do the best you can. Your friends will understand if you struggle at first.

Never let your injury keep you from having a social life. It is important to get out of the house or have family/friends come to visit. Practicing social interactions will help you get better at them.