

Anxiety and Depression

Anxiety and depression are common problems that may be experienced after a brain injury. A person may feel uneasy or apprehensive and/or sad, discouraged or helpless.

Depression and anxiety can be problems in daily life by interfering with a person's ability to take on new challenges, learn new things and/or participate fully in therapeutic activities.

A person may act very upset or overwhelmed when learning new tasks or when there is a change in the daily schedule. Frequent or unnecessary questions may be asked, or there may be a general resistance to trying new things. The person may be afraid to be alone or seek isolation from others. Tearfulness and irritability are also common.

Example 1

Jose is at a brain injury camp this summer. He is helping to set up for the dance this evening. He has asked the leader five times about whether he is decorating nicely. The leader encourages him and tells him he is doing a great job. While Jose is taping up balloons, he becomes very nervous. He then repeatedly asks the leader what time it is. He says that they will never be finished in time for the dance. Jose says he just can't get all of this done and can't help anymore. He goes back to his cabin. Jose's anxiety has interfered with his ability to help with the dance.

Example 2

Sarah has a brain injury. She left inpatient rehabilitation feeling sad and irritable. She did not feel like participating in outpatient rehabilitation, preferring to stay in bed and be alone. Sarah is depressed, which negatively impacts her recovery by interfering with her ability to fully participate in her outpatient rehabilitation.

Ways to Help

- Encourage rest periods and quiet time.
- Tell the person what is going to happen during an activity in order to prepare him/her so anxiety will be minimized.
- Orient the person to the situation (e.g., day, place, anticipated tasks, etc.).
- Maintain as much structure/routine in the daily schedule as possible. Introduce unanticipated changes slowly and calmly.
- When leaving usual surroundings, keep familiar items nearby, such as photographs, toys and special clothing.
- Start with small challenges and gradually progress as tolerated.
- Inform the doctor if anxiety and/or depression are interfering with daily activities, including active therapy participation.