



Mapping Access to Program Services

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Navigating The Way

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Traumatic Brain Injury

Definition

A traumatic brain injury (TBI) is an injury to the head from a blunt or penetrating trauma such as falls or gun shot wounds or an injury from rapid movement of the brain within the skull as from motor vehicle crashes or being shaken.

Incidence

An estimated 5.3 million Americans, more than 2% of the population, currently live with an identified disability caused by a traumatic brain injury. Two million people sustain a brain injury every year. Each day 5,500 people sustain a TBI. In Alabama 10,220 individuals sustain a traumatic brain injury yearly.

Characteristics

Brain injury affects who individuals are, the way they think, learn, remember, act and feel. Changes can occur in physical functioning, thinking (attention, processing speed, communication, learning and memory, planning/organizational abilities) and/or emotional/behavioral control. While there are common physical, thinking and emotional challenges with a brain injury, it is important to remember that TBI is like a snowflake... no two are identical. The specific challenges for each person are based on the specific cause, severity, and location of damage within the brain itself.

For many people brain injury is a hidden disability with changes in function remaining "invisible" to observers. Because of this people tend to discount or forget that the individual has life long issues.

Recognizing the Disability

There are some indicators to look for when working with customers that might signal a possible brain injury.

- Not remembering appointments
- Difficulty remembering new information or new instructions
- Inconsistency in reporting information, i.e. work history
- Difficulty reading, writing, or doing math
- Difficulty concentrating, easily distracted
- Poor judgment (e.g., taking unnecessary risks)
- Difficulty in problem solving
- Difficulty getting tasks started
- Difficulty following complex or multi step instructions
- Difficulty with word finding
- Difficulty with prioritizing tasks or goals

- May seem in slow motion, i.e., movements, communication, reactions.
- Easily frustrated and more easily losing control.

Work Related Accommodations

There are a number of techniques for assisting customers with brain injuries who have challenges resulting from their brain injury. **REMEMBER NOT ALL INDIVIDUALS WITH A BRAIN INJURY WILL HAVE ALL OF THESE CHALLENGES AND WILL, THEREFORE, NOT NEED ALL OF THESE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGIES.**

Physical Accommodation Strategies

Customers with brain injuries may have some general slowness, fatigue more easily, have residual headaches or sensitivity to noise or bright lights.

- Allow additional time to get from place to place.
- Consider a quiet environment avoiding noises and intensive lights.
- Keep instructional session short with periods for rest and breaks from planned activities.
- Give simple directions on getting to the employer. Be concrete about the time of the appointment and the employer's expectations.
- Keep in mind that they may be on medication that may affect the drug testing outcome.

Attention Accommodation Strategies:

A Career Center is a busy place with many distractions. It is easy for a customer with a brain injury to have difficulty paying attention.

The customer may appear uninterested, but in fact is having problems following conversations.

- Keep conversation focused and have customer rephrase to ensure comprehension.
- Work on one task at a time.
- Engage customer in their plan development.
- Meet in quiet room with minimal visual and auditory distraction.
- Be sure to have customer's attention before starting a conversation.

Processing Speed Accommodation Strategies:

Customers with brain injuries may have difficulty processing information or producing written information at the usual pace or in transferring old information to a new situation.

- Allow additional time for customer giving written or verbal responses.
- Slow your speed of discussion, making sure they understand.
- Don't rush.
- Offer assistance with completing written forms.

Initiation Accommodation Strategies:

Customers with a brain injury may have difficulty beginning activities. It may appear that he/she is not interested or motivated, but instead needs assistance to begin working on tasks.

- Establish structured routine of daily job seeking tasks.
- Break down activities into simpler steps. Encourage them to complete one task at a time.
- Make a checklist of activities that need to be completed each day, check off each completed task.
- Establish time frames in which each task should be completed.

Communication Accommodation Strategies:

Customers with a brain injury may have difficulty with word-finding, staying on topic, or in comprehension.

- Help customer stay on topic, redirect when necessary.
- Ask them to restate important points to ensure their understanding.
- Encourage them to prepare an agenda in advance with items they need to discuss or ask.

- Cue customer if having word finding problems.
- Avoid open-ended questions, use yes/no or structured format where possible.

Learning and Memory Accommodation Strategies:

A customer may have difficulty remembering tasks from day to day or instructions about job seeking tasks. The person may have difficulty remembering new information,. They might forget job interview appointments.

- Encourage customer to write down instructions/information– review for accuracy.
- Provide written summary of discussed information.
- Be concrete about the employer's expectations.
- Present information in concise, small chunks.
- Check their understanding by asking for restatement of information.

Executive Functioning Accommodation Strategies:

To find and maintain employment customers must successfully conduct a job search and address other personal needs (transportation, child care, etc.). This may be difficult for a person with a brain injury who has problems with organizing and planning. They may also have difficulty with decision making and problem solving, such as, identifying which job leads to pursue and deciding how to answer interviewer's questions. They may act impulsively, not thinking through the relevant options.

- Break down job search into simple steps, with clear, detailed instructions on how to complete each step.
- Present information in factual manner, avoid abstract concepts.
- Provide several solutions to a problem (have them write down the pros and cons of each option) and encourage them to make the best choice.
- Help customer formulate plans, organize, and prioritize tasks– BE SURE THEY WRITE THEM DOWN.
- Provide written directions– summarize steps.

Emotional/Behavioral Accommodation Strategies:

The job seeking process can be stressful for anyone, including a person with a brain injury. It means meeting new people, learning new things, interviewing with employers, and starting a new job. As a result of the brain injury, the person may be more vulnerable to emotional distress.

- Don't interpret lack of emotion for lack of interest.
- Point out consequences of decisions, both short term and long term.
- Expect the unexpected and remain calm. Modeling calm behavior can help the customer modify his/her behavior and possibly prevent a situation from escalating.
- Take the individual into a private room and give them a few minutes to regain their composure.
- Redirect the customer to a different topic or activity.
- Provide constructive feedback.
- Avoid focusing on their deficits.

Social Situations Accommodation Strategies:

Getting along with coworkers and supervisors is as important to employment success as performing job tasks. Customers with a brain injury may not be aware of the impact of their behavior on others. They may not be as sensitive to subtle social nuances as others would expect them to be.

- Discuss the types of questions that can be expected during a job interview and determine with the customer the best response to the questions.
- Role play with the customer and give constructive feedback.
- Provide clear expectations for appropriate behaviors at the Career Center, provide feedback.
- If undesired behavior occurs, discuss in a private space, in calm, reassuring manner. Review expected behaviors.

Compensation Tools

Calendar, Memory Logbooks, Electronic/computer Reminders, Watches, Timers, Job Checklists, Job Schedule, Notepad, Calculator, Day Planner, Telephones with Alarms, Cue Cards, Enlarged Keyboards or Computer Screens, and Job Coaches.

Strategies for Enhancing Vocational Outcomes

This following list (developed by Lisa Le, VR counselor specializing in TBI) provides some examples of potential work related needs and possible accommodation techniques. These accommodations are generally provided by the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor or Job Coach. To receive assistance with accommodating the individual with a traumatic brain injury contact the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services or the Alabama Head Injury Foundation.

<u>NEEDS</u>	<u>ACCOMMODATIONS</u>
Structured work tasks	Daily work task checklist attached to a clipboard; tape recorded reminders played on portable headphones
Maintenance of on-task behavior	Daily work task checklist attached to clipboard; play music on headphones to minimize distractions
Evaluation of work behavior	Job coach meetings with supervisor and periodic completion of evaluation form by supervisor with feedback by both job coach and supervisor
Assistance determining time and date throughout work day	Obvious visual cues for time and date (e.g., digital clock and large print calendar)
Assistance in remembering work instructions	Tape recorder with headphones
Retention of co-worker's names	Photos of co-workers placed in album with labels; support from co-workers in using their names
Time management (returning from breaks on time; work speed)	Stop watch
Time management/organization/worker responsibility	Develop checklist and attach to clipboard
Assistance in remembering job tasks	Employee handbook and manual in easy-to-read format compatible with individual's learning style

Resources

Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services- Maria Crowley 1-888-879-4706
mccrowley@rehab.state.al.us

Alabama Head Injury Foundation- Sandy Koplun 1-800-433-8002 sandykoplun@bellsouth.net

Job Accommodation Network- www.jan.wvu.edu