

ABI Services  
...serving  
individuals with  
acquired brain  
injury, their  
families and  
their  
communities

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-- prepared by Sask. North Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Services

## Confabulation and Brain Injury

A brain injury, either caused by a traumatic event (traumatic brain injury) or by other means (acquired brain injury) can cause damage to the brain in multiple ways. An individual may experience a wide variety of symptoms and changes associated with the injury. Brain damage can lead to difficulty performing daily skills, including eating, walking, getting dressed, thinking and speaking.

Difficulty with daily tasks can be frustrating – a variety of brain injuries can inhibit an individual’s ability to communicate and think clearly. These difficulties can range from trouble remembering facts, people, past events, or losing executive functions such as the ability to plan, organize, multitask, assess riskiness of behavior, or connect consequences to actions. Understanding what is being said, being able to attend to conversation, and the ability to communicate all require areas of language and cognition to function appropriately.

There are many different communication deficits that can occur with a brain injury – one such problem with communication is called **confabulation**. Confabulation occurs in individuals that appear to have functional communication abilities. The individual is able to communicate relatively easily, using standard sentence structure and conversational language. It can occur in individuals with average or above-average functional I.Q. When speaking with others, this person appears to function normally, making it difficult for interviewers, probation officers, police officers, family members, or acquaintances hearing the adequately conveyed information to recognize the problem.

**Confabulation: A plausible, yet imaginary memory that fills in gaps in what is remembered.**

## ***Confabulation and Brain Injury con't...***

Many individuals with confabulating deficits have the ability to tell elaborate and detailed stories that seem plausible and realistic. The problem with confabulation is that the story or memory that the individual is discussing has been twisted and changed into a story that is not a true memory; this information has been created by the individual. Even odder, although the information often paints the storyteller in a positive light, he or she is completely unaware the information is false, believing wholeheartedly they are telling the truth. The alteration of information is not intentional, as the events in the story are perceived to have happened. This is why confabulation is often called “honestly lying.”



Confabulation is an interesting challenge due to the lack of awareness in individuals presenting the false information. The impacted individual generally has vivid memories that this information is true because, in their mind, the event happened. Confabulation is viewed as a normal pattern of memory, as the mind naturally fills in the gaps in memory. However, in those with

brain damage, memory issues, or executive function damage, the system goes haywire. Family and friends can have difficulty understanding confabulation when they perceive an individual's stories or lies to be a conscious effort. This is not the case with true confabulation, as the individual that is having the conversation is not lying – they are communicating information they believe to be true.

For most individuals that have this issue, there are pieces of the information that may be true. Often the brain mixes up events or facts, but there exists some element of truth in the information that the person is relaying. Because elements of truth do exist in the story, an uninformed person may perceive the information as perfectly logical and factually accurate. When presented with misleading factual evidence or leading questions during interrogation, the risk of implanting memories is further heightened. Because these memories are real to the individual, it may be difficult to redirect this individual in a conversation. The individual also believes the memory is real and the information and conversation that they are having is perfectly logical and accurate. Accepting that information believed to be true is in fact false is often difficult to accept, and can cause a great deal of anxiety and stress for all parties involved.

## Confabulation and Brain Injury Con't...

When discussing errors in factual information with someone with a brain injury, it is important to be respectful of their inability to report information accurately. Utilizing professionals such as speech-language pathologists, psychologists and mental health professionals can be instrumental in assisting the individual to understand that they may not always have all of the information they need, or that some of the information that they believe to be true may not be factual. Although they may not be able to eliminate the process of confabulation completely, they may be able to outline strategies that allow the individual to check facts or consult with caregivers before relaying information.

Caregivers play an important role in the process of individuals with a brain injury. In the instance of confabulation, it is important to have a support system in place to ensure that when communicating with medical

professionals or relaying important information, the individual does not inadvertently cause himself or herself harm. Information such as finances and personal and medical information should be verified to ensure accuracy and reliability. By double-checking information, utilizing caregiver information, or re-checking facts given by these individuals, errors can be avoided in changes to medical care or medications.

An individual that exhibits confabulation is not a bad person – they are suffering from memory loss, and an inability to regulate information. When an individual has damage to the part of the brain that controls executive functioning, information that may be completely believable and factual to the injured person can be comprised of memories and data that are inaccurate. Support and direction are important for all individuals working through this type of process.

St. Reference: Brain Injury and Confabulation: A Review for Caregivers and Professionals-Concordia University – Saint Paul

### ABI Services Library

We also have a large collection of reference books, activity guides, and easy to read books available for survivors, family members & professionals to borrow.

We have an online searchable list of all the resources in our collection.

Check out: [www.librarything.com/catalog/ABIServices](http://www.librarything.com/catalog/ABIServices)

To borrow resources from this collection, contact: **Lisa Chambers** phone 306-765-6629  
email: [lchambers@paphr.sk.ca](mailto:lchambers@paphr.sk.ca)

Additional resources are also available on the provincial website at <http://www.abipartnership.sk.ca/index.cfm>

# Sask North Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Services

## Who We Are

Sask North Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Services is a group of programs that assist individuals, families and communities affected by an acquired brain injury

We are a part of the Acquired Brain Injury Partnership Project that is managed by Sask Health and funded by Saskatchewan Government Insurance (SGI).

Our programs include:

- Sask North ABI Outreach Team
- Sask North Independent Living Program
- Sask North Education and Prevention Program

## Who We Can Help

To qualify for services clients must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Have a diagnosis of moderate to severe acquired brain injury supported by medical records and be medically stable.
- Be a resident of Saskatchewan or eligible for Saskatchewan Health coverage.
- Are open to working cooperatively on goal-directed rehabilitation with ABI and other service providers.
- Community agencies, caregivers, employers, families and schools who require resources and support are eligible as well.

\*\*Individuals are prioritized for services based on time since injury with priority given to those whose injury occurred in the past (3) years.

\*\*Individuals who have a congenital brain injury or one that is a result of a progressive condition will not be considered.

## What We Do

### Sask North ABI Outreach Team

- Case management: helping develop client-driven goals, coordinating health services, providing referrals and planning a return to work or school.
- Consultation: Providing information to others regarding specific client care.
- Brain injury education
- Adult & children's camps

### Sask North Independent Living Program

- Activities of daily living: helping individuals become more independent through short-term interventions.
- Assistance to find housing.
- Therapeutic recreation and Leisure services.
- Vocational: exploring work or volunteer opportunities.

### Sask North Education and Prevention Program

- Prevention Activities: Prevent Alcohol & Risk-related Trauma in Youth (PARTY) Program, No Regrets Program, Brain Walk, safety resource kits, ATV, snowmobile & traffic safety, bike safety, child car seat clinics and fall prevention.
- Mild brain injury education.



***Our mission is to provide individual and family support to people with ABI so that they may live successfully in their communities with improved quality of life.***



**Sask. North  
Acquired Brain  
Injury (ABI)  
Services**

1521 – 6<sup>th</sup> Ave West  
Prince Albert, SK  
S6V 5K1

PHONE:  
306-765-6630

TOLL FREE:  
1-866-899-9951

FAX:  
306-765-6657

**Coffee Talk**

Join us for a morning of good conversation, sharing, learning, and lots of laughs.

- **Mondays** (except for stat holidays)
- **10:30 – noon**
- **South Hill Mall – Community Room**  
behind Easy Home – East Mall Entrance)



***Drop in for all or portion of this weekly group.  
Free program. Refreshments provided.***

If lack of transportation is preventing you from attending, please contact Nicole at 765-6480 for assistance.

**Introduction to ABI**

**Online Series**

Available online at [www.abipartnership.sk.ca](http://www.abipartnership.sk.ca)

Designed to provide basic level knowledge about the effects of brain injury and strategies to help recovery.

Many other resources also available on this website.

**ABI Drop-In Program**

*Join us for an afternoon of cards, games and fun*

- Wednesdays
- 1:30 to 3:30pm
- Minto Bowl & Rec Centre (lounge area)  
210 – 13<sup>th</sup> Street East, Prince Albert

***Coffee will be supplied.  
The program is free.***

If lack of transportation is preventing you from attending, please contact Nicole at 765-6480 for assistance.

**Local Brain Injury Support Groups**

**Prince Albert** – Contact: Jeanine Hackl (306) 960-4012

