

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

Sexuality After Brain Injury

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



Sexuality is a critical issue for people with acquired brain injuries (ABI). The term sexuality refers to more than sexual activity – it also refers to creating comfortable relationships from which intimate relationships can grow. Many caregivers and family members are uncomfortable talking about sexual issues. They ignore them. In addition, treatment of people with ABI does not include a sexual education component in most cases.

Medical and rehabilitation specialists are trained to treat the physical aspects of brain injury, such as talking, walking, learning skills, and other basic functions. Social problems – forming relationships, sexuality –are largely ignored. However, for those recovering from brain injury, these issues are very important elements of their long-term goals. These goals include working

productively, living independently, and feeling comfortable in the community in which they live.

Because sexuality often makes clinicians, caregivers, and family members uncomfortable, very few people with ABI are reassured that their sexual feelings are normal. It is important for those who are involved with persons with ABI to recognize these feelings *and* address the accompanying issues. The truth is, people with ABI experience sexual feelings every day, so the subject really cannot be avoided.

Reference: Sexuality Issues for People with Traumatic Brain Injury by David Strauss, Ph,D,

Common Changes

The most common changes for a survivor are either a decrease in interest in sexual relationships or uninhibited behaviour in inappropriate situations. In both cases, it is important to remember that this behaviour is the result of the brain injury.

* Cognitive difficulties, such as uninhibited speech or behaviour, poor social judgment and misunderstanding social cues, are often the source of inappropriate behaviour. The Survivor

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may say things out loud that others think but do not say. For example, you may think someone attractive; the survivor may bluntly tell a stranger they find them attractive. A survivor may interpret friendliness as a sexual approach, and may be surprised by the rejection they experience when they respond sexually.

Some changes may leave a survivor vulnerable to exploitation. For example, impaired judgment may prevent them from recognizing a potentially dangerous situation, or they may lack the sixth sense that tells them someone who seems friendly is really seeking to take advantage.

*Social skills are an important part of sexuality, and difficulty with them will affect a survivor's relationships with others. If he has memory impairment, shows little change in facial expression, or takes longer to put thoughts into words, he may find it difficult to form friendships. Limited social relationships will reduce the possibility for a romantic relationship. This is a cause of much anxiety for adolescents and young adults.

* Depression is a common occurrence for both survivors and their families. Being depressed or feeling down can influence one's sexual desire. In this case, it is more important to treat the depression itself than the symptom.

* Parents of a child with a brain injury may find their sexual relationship changes. Stress, fatigue and emotions such as anger, guilt and depression can affect sexual interest.

*A spouse who becomes the caregiver may find it difficult to maintain a sexual relationship, because the roles of caregiver and lover do not mix easily. Many caregiving spouses report a variety of reasons for their declining interest in sex. They may not have a lot of energy. The survivor's appearance, behaviour and intellectual abilities may change, and he may no longer be the kind of person the spouse would have chosen as a sexual partner. Survivors may appear to have an increased interest in sex, because they cannot remember when they last had intercourse with their partner. Keeping a written log may help such a situation.

Reference: The Survival Guide. Living with Acquired Brain Injury in the Community

What can you do about...

Altered body image/sexual self-view

- Seek counseling and/or support from peers.
- Allow time to incorporate new body image into self-identity.
- Focus on those things you like about yourself.
- Increase social contacts/participation
- Try to gain a sense of control over physicality, appearance and daily hygiene practices

Social/Sexual Behaviour Challenges

- Seek speech therapy for communication difficulties
- Access family counselling/support
- Maintain a regular routine
- Access social skills training program
- Establish plan for community reintegration
- Provide consistent feedback for any problem behaviour
- Use memory journal

Addressing Problematic Sexual Behaviour

Before you try and change a person's behaviour consider:

1. Is this behaviour a problem because of other's values and beliefs?
2. Is this behaviour the result of an underlying, correctable concern?

If the answer to both of these questions is "no" then, with the person, the family, and (if applicable) any other caregivers, and the organization or facility:

1. Identify the behaviour most in need of change.
2. Describe all aspects of the behaviour.
3. Consider to what extent the person is able to control the behaviour.
4. Involve the person as much as possible in changing the behaviour.
5. Find alternatives and rewards that will help the person change the behaviour.
6. Maintain a consistent approach.
7. Ensure that the message about the behaviour is clearly communicated, both verbally and nonverbally.

8. Remember that only the person's behaviour is inappropriate; not the person.
9. Be patient (changing these behaviours may take months because of memory loss. However, having a consistent approach to addressing the behaviour can help caregivers and/ or family members cope with potentially frustrating situations).

Reference: handout from Sexual Health Rehab Services-G.F. Strong Centre



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



To borrow resources from this collection, contact: **Lisa Chambers** phone 306-765-6629
email: 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**

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Prince Albert, SK
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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

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 – 13th 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

Tisdale – Contact: Shelley (306) 873-5420 or Andrea (306) 873-5617

Prince Albert – Contact: Glenda James 1-877-373-1555

