

Changes in Self-Awareness After Brain Injury

After a brain injury there are many changes. Sometimes students may not recognize that a brain injury has resulted in changed abilities or new needs for assistance. Decreased awareness of needs and difficulties may also prevent a student from setting realistic academic or vocational goals. It is challenging for parents and educators of youth with brain injury to offer assistance when the student believes that nothing is wrong. This is especially true during adolescence when youth are developmentally seeking greater autonomy. As a result, many students in junior high and high school may not be willing to accept special accommodations or adopt compensatory learning aids. Fortunately, the good news is that accommodations and/or interventions can help build awareness. The first step is to understand the origins of altered awareness. The next step is to select the most appropriate strategy to facilitate increased insight or awareness for students who may not be fully aware of changes in their abilities and functions.

SOURCES OF UNAWARENESS

Changes in awareness are complex, arising from several sources. To effectively help the student educators must consider many factors and consider several strategies. Identifying which sources are responsible for an awareness difficulty many require collaborative discussions and observations with students, teachers, parents, guidance counselors, and a psychologist or neuropsychologist familiar with brain injury.

Source 1: Direct injury to brain structures responsible for awareness and thinking processes

There are parts of the brain that are responsible for giving us information about our functioning. When there is damage to the frontal brain, students may not be aware of changes in their thinking ability. Brain damage that affects memory or problem solving may also contribute to unawareness. If a student cannot remember information or does not fully

understand it, that information cannot be used effectively.

Source 2: No opportunity to experience changes

Sometimes a student simply has not had the opportunity to experience the changes brought on by a brain injury. A cognitive impairment does not hurt like a broken leg. The student may not think there is memory or learning problem unless experience shows otherwise.

Source 3: Feelings of "I know what's best"

Adolescence marks the time when students struggle to develop an identity separate from parents and teachers. When a brain injury thrusts an adolescent student into a situation where more guidance and input from adults is needed, it can be very frustrating. They may reject any information suggesting they are limited in any way.

Source 4: Psychological denial

Some older students may suppress or deny information or evidence suggesting they have problems. This is a psychological issue rather than a direct result of brain injury. Sometimes people are not ready to face the consequences of a brain injury.