

Effects of ABI on stages of development

A suggestion for implementing the strategy

'Understand impacts on learning and wellbeing' from the Guide: [Acquired brain injury and learning](#)

-
- Includes:**
- Age at time of injury can influence impact
 - Injuries at 0–3 years
 - Injuries at 3–6 years
 - Injuries at 6–12 years
 - Injuries at 12–16 years
 - Injuries at 16–19 years

Inclusive Education

From

Guide: [Supporting learners with acquired brain injury](#)

Strategy: [Understand impacts on learning and wellbeing](#)

Suggestion: [Effects of ABI on stages of development](#)

Date

20 April 2024

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Age at time of injury can influence impact



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Injuries at 0–3 years

Overview of indicators.

Between years 0–3 children are usually:

- acquiring language
- refining sensory and motor systems
- regulating sleep–wake patterns
- beginning to understand cause and effect
- establishing connections with caregivers.

Possible disruptions following brain injury include:

- difficulty explaining or communicating needs
- not connecting cause and effect
- high reliance on support and structure
- disturbed sleep
- easily overwhelmed
- behaviour hard to predict
- see–sawing emotions from content to angry
- low responsiveness to others.

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Injuries at 3–6 years

Overview of indicators.

Between years 3–6 children are usually:

- growing understanding of cause and effect
- developing an ability to think before acting
- focusing on one aspect of a situation at a time
- emotionally focussed on control and mastery
- concrete and rigid thinkers.

Possible disruptions following brain injury include:

- see-sawing emotions from content to angry
- difficulty making decisions, judging situations, initiating play
- immediate expression of feelings
- high anxiety when separating from caregivers
- difficulty grasping concepts such as: same/different; quantity (some/all); size (big/little); shapes; time concepts (yesterday/next week) and cause and effect
- dependence on structure and organisation provided by adults.

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Injuries at 6–12 years

Overview of indicators.

Between years 6–12 children usually:

- develop a robust understanding of cause and effect
- are ready to learn academic skills
- recognise that effort is important
- recognise intention of acts as important.

Possible disruptions following brain injury can include:

- disruption in reading, spelling, maths skills
- lack of success despite hard work
- avoidance
- random behaviour during unstructured times
- depression, social isolation, or withdrawal from peers
- sleep disturbance
- tiredness.

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Injuries at 12–16 years

Overview of indicators.

Between years 12–16 young people usually:

- consider three or more dimensions simultaneously
- use abstract reasoning
- show anxiety related to social and emotional development
- have increasing autonomy
- begin identity development
- take responsibility: able to care for self, babysit, perform jobs for pay.

Possible disruptions following brain injury may include:

- unevenness in learning profile
- difficulty learning new concepts
- slower rate of mental processing
- difficulty organising complex tasks over time
- judgment and reasoning difficulties
- increased “frustration” response
- depression
- fatigue.

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Injuries at 16–19 years

Overview of indicators.

Developmental characteristics of 16–19-year-olds:

- complex reasoning and judgement
- ability to plan and execute complex projects over time
- solid sense of own identity
- social sophistication
- capacity for compassion.

Possible disruptions following brain injury:

- new and unexpected gaps in learning (for example, memory for numbers)
- reduced speed of mental processing
- inability to organise complex tasks
- conflict between specific challenges and career goals
- interference in developmental drive toward independence/separation
- social awkwardness
- tiredness
- defensiveness regarding emotional/cognitive problems
- depression
- negative body and/or social image.

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