What is brain injury-specific behavior?
Brain injury-specific behavior is behavior that results from an injury to some or all of the neurons, or nerve cells, in the brain. These cells do not regenerate, but sometimes other parts of the brain can be retrained to compensate for the injury, and address brain injury-specific behavior. Recovery from a brain injury can take many years, and brain injury-specific behavior may be a lifelong issue.

Autonomic/sympathetic storming
The autonomic nervous system is the most primitive part of the brain. It is responsible for the “fight or flight” reaction. It is difficult for an injured brain to turn this switch off, even after the crisis is over. This is because the brain becomes aware of its injury and has prolonged anxiety.

Storming might present itself as repetitive movements, usually pacing, or sound-making, usually grunting. The person’s pupils might be dilated and they might be anxious or angry. When this occurs, it is important to create a low-stimulation environment and encourage sleep so the nervous system can reset.

Low-stimulation environment
A low-stimulation environment reduces sound, light, and movement. During times of duress, limit visitors to two or fewer. Turn off the television. Turn down the lights. Avoid activities during states of anxiety and try not to argue. Usually a person with a brain injury will be more receptive after resting in a less stimulating environment. Avoid crowds, conversations involving too many speakers, and allow times of rest to process information.

Confabulation
People with brain injuries sometimes believe a story that is not true. They might confuse timelines, or jump to conclusions they are unwilling to let go of. This is a natural coping mechanism as the brain tries to make sense of situations with missing information or poor memory organization. It might be hard to redirect a person who is confabulating. Making daily log notes, bringing pictures of events, and providing correct details may help a person remember more correctly. Whenever possible, follow a routine when trying to help redirect someone.

Impulsiveness
It is normal for people with brain injuries to be impulsive, especially early in their recovery. If there is unsteadiness or a history of falls, make sure shoes are on for traction. If the doctor has ordered a helmet, make sure it is worn at all times, even while sitting down. Make sure glasses are on and hearing aids are in, and that the person is using any necessary equipment like a walker or cane. Provide a safe environment by removing unnecessary clutter. If a person is impulsive in the community, reducing stimulation could help.

Remember:
- People with brain injuries experience good days and bad days.
- A person who has a brain injury might become upset more easily, need more space, and might not seem as warm, friendly, or sensitive as before. This could improve in time, but this might also be a new normal. Someone with a brain injury might need more alone time than before.
- Like most people, a person with a brain injury does not like to be told what to do. Whenever possible offer choices.

Questions?
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