



Managing Emotional Changes for Employment After Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

The way people experience or express their emotions may change after a traumatic brain injury (TBI). This may affect how they interact with their colleagues and perform at work.

Factors that affect emotional wellbeing include:

- **Mood swings or inappropriate reactions.** These changes can make it hard to manage stress, collaborate, or maintain professional relationships.
- **Loss of independence or changes in family and social roles.** Changes from how you were before the injury can cause frustration. This can lead to reduced focus, motivation, and engagement at work.
- **Emotional reactions** due to cognitive changes. These changes may include problems with memory, attention, or reasoning. They can make it hard to keep up, stay organized, or follow instructions. This can lead to an emotional response like anxiety or anger. These responses may affect performance at work.
- **Depression or anxiety.** These feelings may develop after a TBI or get worse if already present. They can reduce productivity. They can also make interactions at work harder.

Tips for Managing Emotional Problems at Work

- **Plan your daily routine.** Create and follow a consistent daily routine. This will create structure and reduce uncertainty.
- **Schedule breaks.** Take regular, short breaks throughout the day. This helps you to recharge and stay productive.
- **Use stress management techniques.** Try deep breathing exercises or progressive muscle relaxation. These techniques can reduce stress at work and help to enhance focus.
 - Tip: Do stress management at a scheduled time, not just when you are feeling stressed.
- **Be aware of triggers.** Identify your stress triggers. Step away from stressful situations when you need to. This will help you to regain a sense of calm.



Coping Strategies Outside of Work

Adopting healthy lifestyle habits and coping strategies outside of work can have a positive impact on your work performance. Approaches include:

- » Medication or counseling, or both, can reduce emotional distress. They can also improve your performance at work.
- » Practice good sleep habits and get quality sleep to support your emotional health.
- » Celebrate success when you and others notice improvements.
- » Connecting with others can help improve emotional well-being and performance at work.

Real Life Experience

Wanda continued to work as a writer after her TBI. She often wished someone had told her earlier that what she was feeling was normal. The emotional ups and downs were confusing, especially when recovery didn't follow a clear path. As Wanda explained, "I think what would be good is some way to be able to say it's normal. It's expected to feel this way. There's no constant but if you don't return back to normal, don't be disappointed because there are better things." That message—of acceptance, flexibility, and hope—became an important part of how she made sense of her experience and began to move forward

Tips for Managing Emotional Changes While Looking for a Job

Emotional changes after TBI may make your job search more challenging. Try these tips to reduce the emotional overload when looking for a job:

- » **Work on job applications at a pace that you can manage.** Limit how much time you spend on job applications to reduce emotional overload and fatigue.
- » **Seek encouragement and support** from trusted family and friends during job setbacks.



Special Note: You may need support or accommodations from your employer for some of the strategies in this resource. It is up to you whether you want to disclose that you have had a TBI. You can decide which ideas in this resource feel right for you based on your own comfort level and your workplace situation.

Source: The content of this tipsheet was adapted from *Changes in Emotion After Traumatic Brain Injury*, which was developed by Amanda Zwillig, Ph.D., Angelle Sander, PhD, and Robin Hanks, PhD, in collaboration with the Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center (<https://msktc.org/>).

Disclaimer: The contents of the resource were developed under a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant number 90DPKT0021). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this resource do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, or HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

Copyright © 2026 American Institutes for Research. May be reproduced and distributed freely with appropriate attribution. Prior permission must be obtained for inclusion in fee-based materials.

