



Managing Social Skills for Employment After Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

TBI can affect how you interact with other people. It can affect your ability to take part in a conversation, focus on a topic, and control body language and facial expressions. These changes can make it hard for people with TBI to communicate with and interact with others in the workplace.

Tips for Managing Social Skills at Work

Use the steps below to identify social skill challenges, set manageable goals, and practice strategies that can support communication and workplace interactions.

Step 1. Identify challenges at work related to social skills. Reflect on your social skills to figure out your challenges in the workplace.

Check your **conversation skills**.

- Take turns speaking during team meetings with your team.
- Convey instructions in a clear and concise way.
- Are mindful not to share too much or too little information in conversations.
- Take part in work-related conversations.
- Keep up with the pace and topic of the conversation by inhibiting comments that are no longer on topic as the conversation moves from one topic to another.
- Show interest and support coworkers' ideas in meetings.
- Inquire about how others are doing when they ask about you.
- Limit comments when you feel yourself becoming upset or irritated.

Check your **ability to focus**.

- Focus on conversations in meetings.
- Remember instructions for common tasks.
- Stay on topic during your performance reviews.
- Recall important details during conversations and meetings at work.

Check your **nonverbal communication**.

- Interpret the facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language of your coworkers correctly.
- Show interest and engagement with your eye contact and gestures.
- Present yourself as friendly and approachable to support team morale.

Step 2. Set goals. Pick one or two social skill challenges to improve per day. Write them down, keep them visible, and track your progress each day. Share your goals with someone who can “coach” and practice with you.

Step 3. Practice and get feedback. Practice one social skill each week in real situations, such as lunch with a trusted coworker. Use short scripts when helpful, then ask for feedback on what went well and what to improve.

Practice role plays of challenging interactions. Ask a trusted coworker to help you role play difficult communications. Examples might be asking for a raise or giving a fellow employee feedback. This will allow you to critique your own communication skills.

Coping Strategies Outside of Work

Managing social skills can take time, patience, and effort outside of work. You may want to

- » Practice social skills outside of work (e.g., book clubs, sports) with family and friends. Step away from social situations if you feel overwhelmed, then return when you feel ready.
- » Pause and take a breath before responding and think about the best time and way to respond.
- » Get help from a health care professional, such as a counselor or social worker.



Tips for Managing Social Skills While Looking for a Job

Social skills after TBI may affect your job search. Try these tips to improve social skills when looking for a job:

- » **Practice your skills in low-pressure situations.** You can volunteer, attend a job fair, or meet friends for coffee. You can use prepared scripts to help navigate introductions or resolve disagreements.
- » **Set communication goals for interviews and networking.** Focus on one or two communication skills. This could include maintaining eye contact or asking thoughtful follow-up questions. Use a simple checklist to track your progress and boost your confidence.

Real Life Experience

After her TBI, **Gina** found that her communication style came across as too direct. While coworkers sometimes “thought it was funny” and appreciated her honesty, she recognized that she needed to learn “how to say it in a different way” while still staying true to her personality.



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 *Social Skills After Traumatic Brain Injury*, which was developed by Lenore A. Hawley, MSSW, LCSW; Jody K. Newman, MA, CCC-SLP; Dawn Neumann, PhD; and Therese M. O’Neil-Pirozzi, ScD, CCC-SLP, in collaboration with the [Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center](#).

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.

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