

UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONAL LABILITY

Emotional lability means nothing more than loss of control over emotions. The fact that the emotions are more quickly displayed does not necessarily mean that the emotion is stronger than it was. Instead the person has lost the ability to discriminate about when and how to express his feelings.

While most people can control their expression of joy, sadness or anger, and limit it to the right time and place, the person with the head injury cannot. This difficulty is directly due to damage to the brain, especially the areas dealing with impulses and emotions. These quick and frequent mood swings can be extremely tiring for family members who are trying to keep things on an even keel. As time progresses it is usual for the person with the head injury to relearn increasing emotional control.

Coping with emotional lability (for Family and Carers)

1. Do not criticise the person with a head injury, as their increased sensitivity is likely to lead to an excessive over-reaction.
2. Point out and praise occasions when they do manage to control their emotions. At those times identify and discuss how they managed to maintain self-control. Encourage them to use those strategies again.
3. Try to model calm behaviour yourself.
4. Realise that the person with the head injury will have difficulty coping with even mild stress. Attempt to structure the environment so that unnecessary stress factors are removed.