

BRAIN INJURY AND EMOTION REGULATION

A brain injury can change the way people feel and express emotions. A person with TBI can have several types of emotional difficulties. These include:

DIFFICULTY CONTROLLING EMOTIONS, SOMETIMES KNOWN AS “MOOD SWINGS.”

Some people may experience emotions very quickly and intensely but with very little lasting effect. For example, they may get angry easily, but get over it quickly. Or, they may feel like they are “on an emotional roller coaster,” meaning that they are happy one moment, sad the next, and then angry, and so on. This is called “emotional lability.” “Lability” means undergoing continuous change.

WHAT CAUSES THIS PROBLEM?

- Mood swings and emotional lability are often caused by damage to the part of the brain that controls emotions and behavior.
- Often, there is no specific event that triggers a sudden emotional response. This may be confusing for friends and family members who may think they accidentally did something that upset the injured person.
- In some cases, the brain injury can cause sudden episodes of crying or laughing. These emotional expressions or outbursts may not have any relationship to the way the person actually feels (in other words, they may cry without feeling sad, or laugh without feeling happy). In some cases the emotional expression may not match the situation (such as laughing at a sad story). Usually, the person cannot control these expressions of emotion.