

# WHAT IS IMPULSIVITY AFTER BRAIN INJURY?

Impulsive actions are those made without taking into account possible problems and not thinking about possible consequences.

While we can all be impulsive at times, impulsivity after brain injury is caused by damage to the brain, specifically the frontal lobe. The mechanisms that control our ability to stop and consider (and to filter what we pay attention to) are damaged, and often the damage is not repairable. It is important to remember the impulsive behavior you see is related to damage to the brain, and therefore:

- It is not deliberate
- It may not be apparent to the person themselves
- It is unlikely to go away
- It can fluctuate, particularly when a person is tired

## WHAT DOES IMPULSIVITY LOOK LIKE?

As with most things about brain injury, impulsivity after brain injury will be different in each person. Mostly, it will involve the person doing or saying things without thinking first. Impulsivity after brain injury might include one or more of the following:

- Moving on to another task or activity before completing what is already started.
- Rushing into activities without planning first, and making lots of mistakes.
- Interrupting conversations and talking over others.
- Blurting out personal information about self or others without thinking.
- Making hurtful comments.
- Having trouble waiting and taking turns. Not waiting for your turn. Not patiently waiting in line. A student jumping in with answers in a classroom.
- Not recognizing that you have just finished: eating, drinking, or smoking, so you attempt to continue without stopping.
- It can seem like the need for 'instant gratification' – you want, and do, things now! It does not seem possible to wait.
- Buying things on impulse even when not affordable.
- Lashing out physically or verbally without thinking of the consequence.
- Sexually and socially, impulsivity may lead to promiscuous behavior. This can be a danger to the person at times, in terms of both physical and emotional health.
- Not being able to budget effectively and manage finances successfully.
- Ignoring safety rules, such as not looking for traffic before crossing the street.
- Undertaking tasks without first thinking about safety. Using something inappropriate to do a task because it is the first object you see.