

Adolescents' experiences of communication following acquired brain injury (ABI)



Research Study Findings

About the research study

What did the study aim to do?

This study aimed to explore what communication was like for young people following brain injury. There was not much information on this, so it was an important thing to find out about.

What happened?

Six young people between the ages of 11 and 18, who gave their consent were interviewed for the research study.

The interviewer asked each participant questions about communication but each young person had the chance to talk about what they wanted.

Each interview was recorded. The researcher listened to each interview in turn and wrote down everything that had been said.

The researcher looked at the information from each interview and worked out what was important to each young person.

Then the researcher compared the information from each interview to see what was important to everybody.

Findings

The information from all the interviews was put into three main headings then smaller ones:

The Social World

- Facing disability
- Hiding away
- Being outside of the group

Communication Skills

- Stumbling over words
- Making a Recovery

Life in the Classroom

- Understanding our needs
- Finding solutions

The Social World



Facing disability

Some young people had their brain injury when they were young and others had their brain injury when they were a teenager. There were differences in how each person coped. Some things were very difficult after the brain injury and hard to explain to other people.

'It's more than having a hurting head, it's different to a broken arm. A brain does so much.'

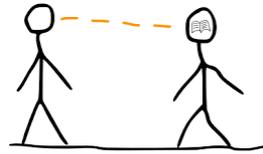
Hiding away

Some young people did not want others to know about their brain injury. They were worried they would be treated differently. If communication was difficult for them after the brain injury, they avoided talking to other people.

Being outside of the group

Some young people had good friends who they got on well with. Other young people really struggled to have good relationships with people of their own age. They felt left out and picked upon, sometimes even bullied.

Communication Skills



Stumbling over words

Some young people had difficulty saying the word they wanted. This was worse when they were meeting new people or when they were tired. Word finding difficulties meant young people could not prove what they knew in lessons at school. They had to say other words instead of the ones they knew. Stumbling over their words might cause a young person to feel panicky.

'If I could actually roll my eyes back into my brain I'd be able to tell you...if I could read you the stuff it was saying, I really wish I could.'

Making a recovery

It took years rather than months for some young people to feel their communication skills had improved. Some young people found ways of taking control of their communication problems and adapted to these. Realising that other people experienced problems when they were talking was helpful.

Life in the Classroom



Understanding our Needs

Young people who had positive experiences of communication in the classroom, seemed happy to be at school and fitted in well there. They felt their communication needs were well understood by their teachers. Some young people in this study did not have good experiences of communication with their teachers. When young people did not understand what they had to do in lessons, they got angry, frustrated or misbehaved. They could not get on with their work and this affected their confidence.

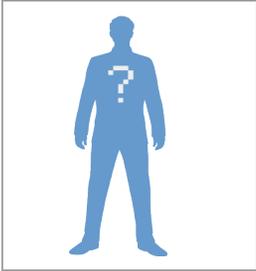
'I'd like to go to a school where they actually understand how hard things are for me.'

Finding solutions

Some young people in this study could tell the researcher what teachers did that was helpful for them. These were things like putting information from lessons into diagrams or bullet points. Sometimes extra help from teaching assistants or special equipment made young people feel different from the rest of the class. They did not like this, they wanted to be treated the same as everyone else.

Conclusions

Self identity



Acquired brain injury affects a young person's identity. If the brain injury happens when a person is very young, they grow up being used to this. If the brain injury happens later, then a person has to cope with sudden changes to their communication skills.

Training



Not all teachers understand the communication needs of young people after brain injury. Training and support needs to be made available for all staff in schools so they can meet the special educational needs of these young people.

Participation



Therapists need to listen to young people to find out about their everyday lives. They should have counselling skills to help young people manage sudden changes to their communication skills after brain injury.

Thank You

Thank you so much to all the participants who took part in this study. Without them this study would not have been possible. We hope that the experiences they have shared will encourage other professionals to think about how they work with young people after acquired brain injury.

Thank you also to the parents who gave up their time to bring the participants to the study centre and waited whilst they took part.

Researcher:

Katherine Buckeridge, Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist, Chailey Clinical Services

Supervisors:

Dr Channine Clarke, Senior Occupational Therapy Lecturer, University of Brighton
Dr Diane Sellers, Research Speech and Language Therapist, Chailey Clinical Services

Contact Us

Chailey Clinical Services
Beggars Wood Road
Lewes
East Sussex
BN8 4JN

Phone: 01825 722112
Email: katherine.buckeridge@nhs.net
Web: www.sussexcommunity.nhs.uk

