

## Brain Injury & Disability Resources

ABIN-PA InfoLine 800.516.8052  
Abuse Reports—Age 0-18 800-932-0313  
Abuse Reports—Age 18+ 800.490.8505  
Aging/Disability Referrals 866.286.3636  
Area Agency on Aging (blue pages)  
BIAPA Resource Line 800.444.6443  
BrainSTEPS (Local Intermediate Unit)  
CareerLink (blue pages)  
ChildrensHealthInsurance 800.986.5437  
Consumer Protection 800.441.2555  
Crime Victim's Benefits 800.233.2339  
Defense & Veterans BIC 866.966.1020  
Disability Rights Network 800.692.7443  
DomesticViolence Hotline 800.799.7233  
Elks Nurses (care plans) 814.781.7860  
Epilepsy Foundation 800.887.7165  
Head Injury Program 717.772.2762  
(1 year of rehab, \$100,000 max)  
Health Insurance [www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov)  
or 800.318.2596  
Health Law Project 800.274.3258  
Independent Living Ctrs 717.364.1732  
Legal Aid (PA) 800.322.7572  
Legal Clinic for Disabled 215.587.3350  
Meals on Wheels [www.mealcall.org](http://www.mealcall.org)  
Medical Assistance 800.537.8862  
Medicare Coverage 800.633.4227  
(Part A & B have in-home services)  
Medicare Complaints 800.783.7067  
Office of Vocational Rehab (blue pages)  
OVR Complaints 888.745.2357  
Social Security 800.772.1213  
Special Ed Consult Line 800.879.2301  
Special Kids Network 800.986.4550  
Waiver Enrollment 877.550.4227  
Waiver HelpLine 800.757.5042  
Women's Law Project 215.928.9801

## ABIN-PA Services

"Empowering Survivors & Families to Rebuild Their Lives."

### InfoLine

Resources. Problem-solving. Support.

### Advocacy

Individual. Government Affairs.  
Nonprofit Coalitions & Collaboratives.

### Education

Conferences. Presentations.  
Staff Training.

### Literature

Free Monthly Newsletter.  
Brochures.  
Booklets.  
PowerPoints.

### Website

Newsletter Archives & Sign-Up.  
Print Literature.  
"Our Stories."  
Print Resource List by Birthdate.  
Rehab Facility Search by Type.  
Videos.

## Brochure Categories

General  
Children <21  
Adults 18+  
Families & Caregivers  
Rehabilitation  
Dual Diagnosis  
Justice System

Brain Injury Advisory:  
Rehabilitation

## CATASTROPHIC STRESS REACTIONS



ABIN-PA is dedicated to increasing public awareness about acquired brain injury and to providing support, education, information, advocacy and other services for individuals with acquired brain injury and their families.

ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY  
NETWORK OF PENNSYLVANIA  
InfoLine: 215.699.2139  
Toll-Free: 1.800.516.8052  
[info@abin-pa.org](mailto:info@abin-pa.org)  
[www.abin-pa.org](http://www.abin-pa.org)

## Who

Those with cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and/or physical limitations due to a brain injury may experience unwelcome biologic “catastrophic stress reactions” or “emotional flooding” from excessive demands. This will interfere with self-esteem, rehabilitation and recovery.

## What

A catastrophic stress reaction (CSR) is a biologically-driven reaction that is unusual for the individual and beyond their control. This event must run its course and then may require many days for recovery. Behaviors can range from a frozen state to tears, agitation and even violence.

## Where

A catastrophic stress reaction can happen anywhere. It is important to learn which activities, events, or locations are best avoided. For example, crowded stores and loud movies are generally not a good idea. As the brain repairs, less effort is needed to cope with these challenges so the frequency and intensity of these reactions will diminish. In the meantime, the brain needs to be protected from excess disturbance.

## When

The brain shuts down or emotions overflow when the biologic capacity of the brain is exceeded. Think of adding cups of water to a bucket—the last cup is no different from prior cups, but the bucket is now overflowing. Since the cups and bucket are invisible, it is best to err on the side of caution and limit activities on days or weeks when important events are scheduled.

## Why

A catastrophic stress reaction occurs when the brain is stressed beyond its biologic capacity to respond. Since the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physical changes which follow brain injury make routine tasks much more difficult (or impossible), it is easy to ask too much and overload the brain, resulting in unusual behavior from days in bed to violence. To minimize overload, pay attention to rest, food, water, soothing activities, signaling, monitoring effort and pacing the day.

## Monitoring effort

Become aware of the effort needed for each situation or recurring task. New activities will always require more effort and will take energy away from tasks that were previously mastered.

## Pacing the day, week

Figure out how many days of the week the person can schedule activities without becoming overwhelmed, and cross off rest days on the calendar. After scheduling one (or two) activities on a particular day, cross off the rest of the day.

## Signaling & Soothing

Learn the facial expressions, comments and behaviors that signal stress is rising. Teach survivors to walk away or signal “stop” with a raised palm to avoid overloading the brain with excessive demands. Soothing activities should be allowed as needed and also scheduled during the day. Decreasing the stress load reduces the likelihood of overload.

## Avoid discussion

A catastrophic stress reaction is a biologic reaction just like a seizure that is not under the control of the individual and must run its course. Often, the individual does not remember the event, so questions are not helpful. Attention to rest, food, water and the other factors will help. Consult a neuropsychologist or neuropsychiatrist if these simple measures are not sufficient.