

# Apathy and Poor Motivation Module

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## Welcome and Module Overview

This summary reviews the key points discussed in the module on poor motivation and difficulty getting going following brain injury. It includes some tasks for you to work on. This module focused on the difficulties people with brain injury can have with getting started on tasks (initiation), difficulties completing tasks or being able to complete all of the steps involved in a task as well as poor motivation to engage in activities. Using the ABC model of behaviour change, Jenny was able to learn why Tran had difficulty starting and completing tasks. She also learned some strategies to help Tran get involved in activities and be involved from start to finish.

## Your Checklist

Here is a list of the topics we will cover in this summary. Tick these off as you go:

1. Starting a Car: Drive, Motivation and Initiation
  - a. Thinking difficulties involved in drive, motivation and initiation
2. Initiation
  - a. Examples
  - b. Antecedents, Behaviour and Consequences
  - c. Prevention and Strategies
3. Drive
  - a. Examples
  - b. Antecedents, Behaviour and Consequences
  - c. Prevention and Reinforcements
4. Motivation
  - a. Examples
  - b. Antecedents, Behaviour and Consequences
  - c. Prevention and Reinforcements
5. Summary
6. Your Checklist

## 1. Starting a Car: Drive, Motivation and Initiation

In Module 2, we used the example of starting a car to explain the types of difficulties people with TBI can have with motivation, drive and initiation. Unfortunately, there are no medicines or pills that can really help with this problem. Often people can have problems getting going, starting tasks or

finishing tasks. This can be very frustrating for families to understand, especially if the person says that they want to do things, but their actions say otherwise.

Using the car example:

We have an engine, which is what is known as our **“drive”**. This is our ability to physically do something such as walking or getting out some bread to make a sandwich.



We have a key, which is our **“motivation”**. In order to start the engine we have to have the desire or motivation to start it.



Once we decide to start our engine, we have to turn the key, which sparks the ignition. This is known as our **“initiation”**. Even when we are motivated and have an engine that works, we need to create the spark to get going.



### Thinking difficulties involved in motivation, drive and initiation

Difficulties in these three areas are quite different and require a different approach. That's because different thinking difficulties are involved. For example, lack of **motivation** may not be a choice or because the person is lazy. Due to the injuries to their brain, the person may not have the skills or capacity to think about what doing or achieving something will mean for them.

Also, some people who have had a brain injury have difficulty thinking about the long-term consequences or benefits of their actions. So they don't have the immediate desire to do something.

These thinking difficulties are very different from those involved in **initiation** where the problem is more that they just cannot seem to start a task or activity, or they may get stuck moving from one step to the next. The person may know what they want to do, but cannot use that idea to start or change their behavior. That means they have a disconnection between 'knowing' and 'doing'.

People with brain injury who have poor initiation, motivation and drive may:

- Have difficulty getting through the steps of a task in order to complete it
- Sit around and not participate in things they used to enjoy
- Say they are going to do something but never get around to it
- Complain of being bored but not do things when suggested
- Get frustrated when others try to help or do things for them

Check which ones your family member has difficulties with.

### Impact of problems in initiation, motivation and drive on families

Problems with apathy can be particularly challenging for families. The person with the brain injury may appear to be unmotivated and uninterested and may also not show spontaneous affection with others any more, or contribute to the romance of the relationship with their partner (such as organising dinners out, or presents or flowers). They may also not respond to emergencies such as water overflowing, or a child crying.

Problems with poor motivation can be successfully addressed using the ABC model and we will discuss that next. But it is important to acknowledge that prompting the person with brain injury to

undertake tasks throughout the day can be tiring. It may be important for you to adjust your expectations about how much activity you can reasonably expect/ ask of your person with brain injury.

## 2. Initiation

### Example

Tran says he wants to make his breakfast for himself, his own way, each day. He does not like it when Jenny steps in and does it for him. This makes him frustrated and irritable. But, when Tran goes to make his breakfast, he starts getting out the things he needs and then stops half way through. He doesn't finish making breakfast and then leaves all the ingredients out to spoil. This makes Jenny frustrated so she steps in to do it herself. But then Tran then gets angry that she has not let him do it.

Is Tran just being lazy? Does he really want Jenny to make it for him?

No, what is really happening is that Tran is having difficulty moving from one step to the next. He knows he wants to make breakfast but he is having trouble putting the steps together to finish the task. In this example, Tran's **initiation** isn't working properly.

### Antecedents, Behaviour and Consequences (ABCs)

In Module 2 we learned how to take a look at what was going on before and after the behaviour to help us understand what might be causing it (antecedents) and what might be keeping it going (consequences).

Let's look at Tran's situation in terms of the ABC model:

What is happening before (**antecedents**) is that Tran knows he wants to do something and wants to be independent but can't initiate the steps needed to follow through the task.

The **behaviour** is that Tran does not initiate the steps, Jenny then attempts to do it for him, and Tran then becomes angry at his wife.

The **consequences** are that Tran doesn't eat and Jenny becomes frustrated with her husband for not allowing her to do it for him.

### Prevention and Strategies

There are a number of practical things families can do to help someone with poor initiation. These include strategies to prevent the behaviour from occurring as well as things to reduce the impact of the behaviour. Ideally, family members should talk with the person with brain injury to see what they like to do and how they like to do it.

Then each of the antecedents can be addressed using different strategies. In the example of Tran making his breakfast, strategies that Jenny can use are:

- Have all the ingredients out and ready for Tran to use which will serve as a prompt for him and also provide him with what he needs
- Sit down with Tran and help him to write down the steps that are involved in making his breakfast, so he can follow these each time. This stops family members having to “nag”. It also means it is in Tran’s words so it is written how he wants to do it. It also helps him not to have to rely on his memory, overcomes issues with distraction and provides a way to “hotwire” initiation problems.
- If Tran gets stuck in a step, Jenny can ask him “Is there anything I can help you do?” or “What do you need to do next Tran?”
- If Tran cannot think of the next step, Jenny could say “Last time you made this, Tran, you did ... next, so do you think that might be what you need to do now?”
- If Tran continues to have difficulties finishing the task, Jenny might say “Tran, would you like me to do these steps, and you can do these ones?” or “Would you like to do this together?”

There are also things that family members can do to address the behaviours themselves. In order to change our family member’s behaviour, we can also change our own behaviour. For example, in Tran’s case, Jenny or other members of the family can:

- Try not to jump in and help. This makes Tran feel he is “useless”. It can be hard not to help, but it is important that family members do not try to “fix” the problem.
- Give Tran space when he gets angry or frustrated (see Irritability/Aggression Module). Instead, Jenny could say “Sorry Tran, I can see that you are getting frustrated. I will be next door and if you need me to do anything to help, then let me know”.
- Come back to Tran in 5 minutes and repeat some of the steps above, such as “is there anything I can help you with?”

Finally, you can also address the consequences. These will change the impact the behaviours will have on the family and reduce the amount they will happen in the future. In Tran’s example, family members can:

- Take 10 deep breaths and walk away to another room when they become frustrated with Tran.
- Always have something that is ready to make or already made for Tran to eat, so that he doesn’t go hungry.
- Reassure Tran and provide him with positive reinforcement for the steps that he did achieve, such as “Tran, it was great how you cut the bread, tomorrow if you want my help, let me know”.
- Praise Tran for calming down quickly, such as “Tran, I can see that not being able to finish the task made you angry and frustrated, but it’s great that you were able to move on from it quickly”.

### 3. Drive

## Example

Tran says that he wants to join Men's Shed so that he can do activities that he enjoyed before his injury. He complains that he is bored and has nothing to do. But whenever Tran is sitting around the house he lays on the couch and watches TV. He could be spending his time at Men's Shed, which he would find more interesting and enjoyable.

Is Tran being lazy?

Answer: No, Tran is having difficulty with starting his engine, or his **drive**. It is quite likely that he also has difficulty with both initiation and motivation as well, but we will focus on drive in this example.

Tran needs some help starting the process of joining Men's Shed (initiation), but he is also having difficulty completing the application process (drive).

## Antecedents, Behaviour and Consequences (ABCs)

Let's look at Tran's example using the ABC model:

Antecedents: Tran has said that he is bored, but doesn't seem to do anything about it.

Behaviour: Tran lays on the couch and watches TV all day.

Consequences: Tran does not engage in activities that he could really enjoy and do well in. Jenny then becomes frustrated.

## Prevention and Reinforcement

How you ask your family member to do things can make a big difference. Remember, prevention is the key!

For example, Jenny could help Tran by downloading the application form to join Men's Shed and say to Tran "Tran, here's an application form to join Men's Shed. Which activities are you interested in doing?". Telling Tran to stop complaining, or telling him what to do without helping him start the task, will not be helpful because it does not help Tran to solve the "thinking problems" that have led to this behaviour.

Another suggestion is for Jenny to say "Tran, do you need any help with the application form? You said you would like to have something to do during the day and Men's Shed has activities you enjoy".

Jenny could even set aside some time to do this with Tran, "Tran, I have 10 minutes free now, would you like me to help you with the application form for Men's Shed?" or "Tran, tonight at 6pm before dinner, would you like to sit down and I can help you with the application form?".

## 4. Motivation

## Example

Tran says he wants to spend more time with his friends but he then never thinks to ring them and arrange for them to go out or to come over. Jenny becomes frustrated because it seems like Tran expects his friends to do all the organising. Tran then complains that no one wants to spend time with him and that people will not want to do things with him so there is no point in trying.

This was frustrating for Jenny because she believed that Tran was being lazy or difficult on purpose.

However, because of Tran's brain injury, he was having difficulty with the motivation to contact his friends. He is also having some thinking difficulties, which make it hard for Tran to problem solve solutions.

## Antecedents, Behaviours and Consequence (ABCs)

Let's look at this situation in terms of our ABCs

**Antecedents:** Tran has said he wants to spend more time with friends because he is feeling lonely.

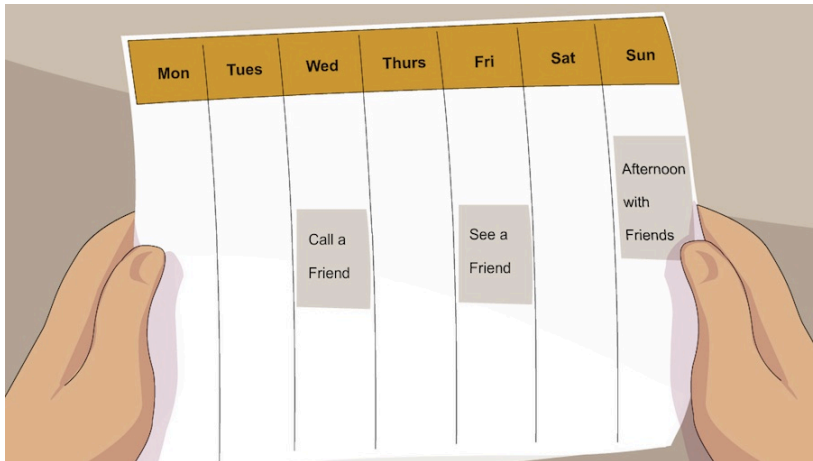
**Behaviour:** Tran can't motivate himself to ring or contact his friends. Jenny constantly reminds Tran that his friends should not have to do all the arranging.

**Consequences:** Tran does not spend time with his friends and feels even more lonely and incapable of maintaining his friendships. Tran also continues to complain about this to Jenny who becomes frustrated and helpless.

## Strategies and Reinforcements

So, if Tran really wants to spend time with his friends, but just cannot motivate himself to contact them, Jenny might be able to help him. Some of the things that Jenny could do are:

- Help Tran to develop some prompts to remind him which friends he can contact when he is bored or lonely. For example, having a notebook with some information on it, that he can keep next to his bed, or he can have a note on his wall.
- Develop a reward system that will reinforce Tran for any task he finishes or attempts to finish.
- Get in touch with some of Tran's friends and see when they are available, then suggest this date to Tran, so that when he does contact them, he is successful. This will encourage him to want to do it again.
- Help Tran to have some contacts easily accessible in his phone, so that it is not difficult to arrange a catch up.
- Arrange with Tran's friends for them to contact him first, then encourage them to ask him to arrange the next time so that he always has something arranged and to look forward to.
- Tran could work out a set time each week that he wants to call his friends. This then becomes routine, and then he does not have to rely on motivation to make it happen.



## Your Checklist

Your tasks to do following this module are:

- Review the Poor Motivation and Drive module again
- Re-read and print out this module summary (it won't take long!)
- Recognise people with TBI can have problems with initiation, drive and/or motivation and that these difficulties are not laziness
- Recognise why these problems occur: thinking difficulties
- Recognise what can be done to prevent them: changing triggers (antecedents)
- Recognise how to help someone with low motivation, drive and initiation
- Explore the frequently asked questions and extra resources sections on the website
- Reward yourself for completing this module.

## Summary

Congratulations on completing the Poor Initiation and Motivation module. In this summary we discussed why and how people with brain injury have difficulty getting going, starting tasks as well as completing tasks. We also discussed why these problems can happen and what thinking problems cause them.

You learned some of the ways you can prevent or change triggers to reduce the likelihood of someone not engaging in tasks and poor motivation. You also learned skills on how to respond to your family member when they show low drive, motivation and initiation.