

Do you only think about yourself and find it hard to see other people's point of view...?

What is egocentricity?

Egocentricity is the characteristic of regarding oneself and one's own opinions or interests as the most important. The person may be more focused on his or her own needs, feelings, and circumstances. Egocentricity can also be defined as self-centredness or the inability to entertain feelings and thoughts of others. Self-centredness can occur as the person with a brain tumour's ability to empathise with others is damaged.

How do I know that I am egocentric?

- Lack awareness of the needs and rights of yourself and others.
- Seem to be selfish about your own needs.
- Be demanding or unreasonable when dealing with others.
- Fail to see or have difficulty understanding other people's point of view or their ideas.
- Not appreciate carers or family members.
- Have limited concern or even notice the needs of others.
- Find it hard to pick up what other people are feeling.
- Seem very focussed on your own needs or ideas.
- Want things done 'right now'!
- Have difficulty waiting.
- Become jealous or upset when activities and conversation do not centre on yourself.
- Want to take up all of your time and gets upset if others leave you.
- Unable to understand how others are feeling.

'John's' Story

'John' is a 42-year-old man with a high-grade frontal tumour. His wife says that 'John' used to be a thoughtful, considerate husband and father. His family are deeply upset by his diagnosis and have made many sacrifices since his hospital discharge but he tells them they have not helped him at all. No matter what his wife is doing, 'John' wants her to drop everything to do the smallest tasks for him whenever he asks. If she doesn't do it straight away, he gets angry and shouts at her. 'John's' wife gave up her job that she loved to look after him full-time. This has taken up so much of her time and been so tiring that respite was set up one day a fortnight so that she could do something as simple as have coffee with her friends for an afternoon. Every time she goes on these well-deserved breaks, 'John' sulks and complains that she doesn't really care about him.

Strategies

For the person with a brain tumour

- Try to look at situations from the other person's point of view.
- Try to 'step out of your shoes' and into the other person's 'shoes' and think about what life is like for them, and how you would feel if they treated you the same way you treated them.
- Tell yourself that other people have their own needs as well and can't spend all their time helping you.
- Take four deep breaths to help calm down if you are having to wait for someone to come to your aid (Controlled Breathing Resource sheet).

KEY FACTS

Carers of people with a brain tumour found that 25% of their relatives were more likely to be insensitive towards the needs of other people.

For the Carer

- Avoid sacrificing all of your life to meet the needs of the person with a brain tumour. Meeting the needs of the person with a brain tumour is important but not at the cost of failing to meet your own needs.
- Be aware that carers who are able to have some of their own needs met are happier. They are also better able to care for their relative over the longer term.
- Try not to let the person with a brain tumour get to the point where they expect that all their demands will be met.
- Be aware that your relative may be having real difficulty even thinking about your needs because of the damage the tumour has caused to the brain. You can help them by being clear about the importance of having space and time to meet your own needs.
- Be aware that the more you do things for the person, the more they can grow into the habit of relying on you for everything. Even if it takes them longer to do something for themselves, encourage them to do so whenever it is possible.

- Set up some rules about your time and your space. This is a win-win situation. It will help you and also help your relative.
- Manage your own stress levels in a positive manner to avoid carer burnout (see Resource sheet on Stress Management).

Questions to ask your health professional

- What is the cause of the self-centredness?
- Is it related to the tumour itself?
- Is it related to the treatments given for the tumour or other medications?
- Could the self-centredness be an unrelated medical condition and does this need treatment in itself?
- Do I/we expect the self-centredness to get better or worse over time?
- Are there any medications that can help the problem?
- Will a psychologist be able to help treat this problem?

Links to other information:

- <http://braininjury.org.au/portal/fact-sheets/self-centredness---fact-sheet.html>
- Resource Sheet – Stress Management
- Resource Sheet – Controlled Breathing