Emotional lability is caused by an injury to the brain that results in sudden and rapid shifts in emotion. It occurs most often in the first few months after a stroke or brain injury. Episodes of emotional lability can last several minutes. They often begin and end abruptly. Episodes slowly decrease over time.

Effects of Emotional Lability

- Person shows emotions that may not be appropriate to the situation. The emotions shown may not reflect how the person is truly feeling. Example: laughing at a funeral.

- Overall poor emotional control. He or she may cry and/or laugh more easily and more often.

- Because feelings and behaviors may not match, it can be confusing both to the person experiencing them and to others.

To help someone with emotional lability:

- Ask him to describe what he is feeling.
- Change the topic or distract her.
- Continue talking or doing the activity and ignore the emotional display.
- Accept apologies and offer understanding.

Remind the person that the episodes are an effect of changes in the brain. This will help to decrease embarrassment.