

Learning about Social Communication Disorders

One of a series of pamphlets about Speech after Stroke

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A stroke is damage to part of the brain. It happens when a blood vessel in the brain gets blocked or when it bursts.

A stroke can cause many different problems, depending on the part and amount of the brain that is damaged.

This pamphlet explains **social communication disorders** which can result from damage to the right side of the brain.

Social communication disorders are very subtle. The person seems to be able to talk just fine, but having a conversation with them can be a bit awkward.

This is because the stroke has damaged the part of the brain which controls our “social language” – the rules for how we act during a conversation.

Some examples of social communication disorders are:

- reduced eye contact
- flat expression
- no animation in the voice
- changing topics without warning or reason
- “long-winded” answers
- not starting up or joining in a conversation
- improper comments
- reduced attention span

As well as having some or all of these behaviours, the person may not be aware that anything is wrong. This can be quite distressing for family and friends.

It is important to note that these behaviours are only “disorders” if they are different from the person’s usual style.

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Because they are very subtle, and they are different for every cultural group, what is “abnormal” for one person may be very “normal” for another.

So what can you do to help?

The best thing to do is to speak with the person who has had the stroke as well as to his/her speech-language pathologist. They will be able to give you specific ideas about how you can help.

Here are some suggestions to keep in mind when speaking with a person with social communication disorder:

- ✓ Be aware that the person is not doing this on purpose. The unusual behaviours are due to the stroke.
- ✓ Try to improve the person’s awareness of the behaviour by bringing it to his/her attention once in a while (not all the time, or that will be frustrating for both of you!)

More ways to help ...

- ✓ Point out occasions when the person behaved in his/her normal style and compliment them for this. Relearning the social rules of language can be just as difficult as learning to walk again.
- ✓ Do not be afraid to steer the conversation in the correct direction. Sometimes the person will need your help to stay on track.

If you would like more information, please call the Speech-Language Pathologist below:

This series was written by Justine Lear and Deidre Sperry, Speech-Language Pathologists.