

Stroke & Behaviour Change

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Stroke & Behaviour Change

Recognizing, Understanding & Using Supportive Strategies

Did You Know Behaviour Change Can Be Impacted by:



- ➔ Where the stroke was in the brain
- ➔ The severity of the stroke
- ➔ How long ago the stroke occurred
- ➔ The survivor's personality, thinking, understanding & behaviour before the stroke

Note: Some behaviour changes are impacted by cognitive-perceptual changes and the ability to communicate.

Anger & Aggression

- Angry outbursts occur from time to time and may be due to frustration, difficulty communicating &/or pain

Emotional Lability

- Lack of emotional control
- Fluctuations in emotions
- Emotion doesn't match the situation (e.g. the survivor may laugh or cry at inappropriate times)

Lethargy

- Lack of interest in activities of daily living or leisure activities
- Easily discouraged

Behaviour Changes that May Occur Due to Stroke

Social Isolation

- Low self esteem/confidence (how they feel about themselves)
- Feeling sadness, helplessness, or that life no longer has meaning
- May be due to communication difficulties

Social Judgment

- Difficulty saying and doing the right thing in a situation
- Personality changes, for example:
 - A shy person may suddenly want to be the center of attention
 - A previously neat person may become sloppy



Stroke Can Cause Changes in Behaviour

Behaviour changes may be the result of learning to cope with a life-changing event &/or the result of damage to the brain. The stroke survivor is struggling to cope with the effects of the stroke. This will take time. Treat the survivor as you would like to be treated. Show respect and kindness, and exercise patience.



Judith is a Stroke Survivor. Since her stroke she is having difficulty with:

- ➔ Emotional control. For example, she can't watch the news without crying. This reaction upsets her.
- ➔ Participating in activities because she is feeling bad about herself.
- ➔ Maintaining an interest in her favourite pastimes.

"Mom used to love to play bridge but now it is of no interest to her."

- ➔ The daughter is concerned that Judith has lost interest in many of her favourite activities.

"I am reluctant to bring the grandchildren to see mom. The kids don't understand why grandma suddenly becomes angry."

- ➔ The family has noticed that Judith used to be very timid and now she has angry outbursts.

"The last time we were in, mom told us that she had given away her bracelet to another resident."

- ➔ The family has noticed she is giving away personal belongings inappropriately as gifts.

Note: Your knowledge and understanding of behaviour changes after stroke is important. You can help the survivor and family understand that stroke can cause changes in the brain that make a person behave differently.



What You Can Do To Help

Putting yourself in the stroke survivors' position helps them feel understood and valued. Use patience and provide praise for successes.

Emotional Lability

- Ask if the feelings the stroke survivor is showing on the outside match how he/she is feeling on the inside
- Try redirection (e.g. move to another activity or change the subject)
- Encourage the survivor to slow down and take deep breaths
- Explain that loss of emotional control is common

Social Isolation

- Learn what brings enjoyment
- Involve the stroke survivor in their own care
- Encourage participation in favourite activities
- Offer the chance to talk about life experiences and memories
- Support contact with and participation in the community

Social Judgment

- Avoid situations that require decision making beyond their capabilities
- Give feedback and cues to assist in recognizing inappropriate behaviour and offer appropriate alternatives (do not criticize)
- Discuss social expectations with the stroke survivor before entering social situations
- Recognize and praise appropriate actions

Anger & Aggression

- Look for causes of and solutions for the anger
- Assess for and treat pain
- To help prevent outbursts:
 - Learn and follow the survivor's preferences in daily routines
 - Approach from the unaffected side to avoid alarm
 - Explain each task before you begin
 - Alternate between easy and more difficult tasks to encourage success
 - Offer support as needed to reduce frustration

- For those with communication difficulties:
 - Use communication boards/books when provided
 - Tell them "I know that you understand"

- Outbursts:
 - Identify and avoid triggers
 - Move the survivor to a quiet environment
 - Speak in a quite calm manner using a low tone

Lethargy

- Learn, reinforce and support the survivor's interests
- Make it easy to participate
- Attendance is the first step
- Encourage to try again if an initial attempt fails
- Do not embarrass or force the survivor to participate

STROKE NETWORK
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