

# Communication Difficulties Following a Stroke

A quick reference guide

*Developed by North Lincolnshire Speech and Language Therapy Department*

Communication is a complex process. When we communicate parts of our brain complete a range of different tasks. Damage to different parts of the brain can interrupt these tasks and can result in communication impairment.

## **Cognitive Communication Disorder**

Communication is a complex process that involves many different cognitive skills. Disruptions to these can lead to 'cognitive communication disorder' CCD.

Cognitive communication disorder is a specific disorder and should not be confused with primary cognitive impairments.

Features of CCD include:-

- Altered communication behaviour, with reduced application of social rules
- Changes in the quality and effectiveness of communication, including a reduction in coherence and relevance of information they provide (going off the topic in conversation, tangential, verbose output)
- Difficulties processing complex written and spoken information, including difficulties with inference.
- Individuals may present with a change in personality, may appear blunt, egocentric, inappropriate sense of humour, disinhibited comments/remarks.

Remember people with **CCD** can **talk better than they communicate.**

People with **aphasia** can **communicate better than they can talk.**

## **Aphasia/dysphasia**

Aphasia is a language disorder that is caused by damage to the language centres of the brain. Typically it is caused by damage to the left hemisphere. Aphasia can affect a person's understanding, expression, reading and writing.

### **Receptive dysphasia**

Difficulty with understanding language

### **Expressive dysphasia**

Difficulty using language to communicate

### **Symptoms of aphasia**

- Word finding difficulties
- Choosing the wrong words for items/concepts
- Having difficulty putting words together to form sentences
- Using incorrect grammar
- Producing non sense/jargon words
- Having difficulty following instruction
- Needing lots of verbal prompts
- Demonstration to complete task and being unable to read or write

### **Understanding Talking**



### **Reading**



### **Writing**



### **Supporting communication with someone who has aphasia**

- Use short simple phrases
- Support your spoken language with pictures and writing single words.
- Give people extra time to process information and respond to questions.
- Offer choices using objects for example a jar of coffee vs a tea bag.
- Reduce background noise /distractions
- Ensure only 1 person is talking at once. Group situations can be difficult with people with aphasia.
- Be aware that some people's yes/no responses may not be reliable. Check consistency of their yes/no response.
- If someone has difficulties communicating verbally encourage them to use gesture, drawing, body language and communication charts/aids.
- Liaise with the speech and language team for specific advice

### **Apraxia of speech/verbal dyspraxia**

Apraxia/dyspraxia of speech is a motor planning disorder that causes difficulties **co-ordinating** the muscle movements required for speech. The movements may be **incorrect** and in the **wrong order**.

This can result in people having difficulties producing clear speech despite no presence of weakness or paralysis. In severe cases people may not be able to produce any sound at all.

People with apraxia may present with:-

- Difficulties imitating sounds
- Sounds errors/distortions/substitutions
- Inconsistent
- Groping movements of tongue and lips
- Slow speech rate
- Impaired rhythm of speech
- Better automatic speech e.g. greetings and counting

### **Dysarthria**

Dysarthria occurs when a stroke causes damage to the nerves which innervate the muscle for speaking, causing **muscle weakness**.

It may affect the muscles used to move the tongue, lips and soft palate. It can also affect the muscles used for breathing and producing voice.

Dysarthria may cause people to have difficulties speaking clearly.

Dysarthria speech may sound slurred, strained, quiet and slow.

Dysarthria **does not** affect people's ability to understand or use the correct words.

### **Supporting communication with a person who has dysarthria or dyspraxia**

- Dysarthria and/or apraxia in isolation do not affect understanding, if you cannot understand the individual, remember they can understand you.
- Be honest. Tell them if you don't understand.
- Ask them to repeat what they have said, encourage them to slow their speed of speech and say one word at a time.
- Short phrases are easier to understand than longer ones.
- Reduce background distractions – use a quiet environment
- Use a pen and paper/alphabet board, as the individual to write down key words to cue you into the topic of conversation.