



# Stroke & Behaviour Change



## 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 person's personality, thinking, understanding & behaviour before the stroke
- ➔ Depression or anxiety

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

**Emotional Lability**

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

**Anger & Aggression**

- Angry outbursts occur from time to time & may be due to:
  - Frustration
  - Embarrassment
  - Difficulty communicating
  - Feeling hopeless
  - Loss of independence
  - Pain

**Apathy**

- 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

**Remember:** The person may not be aware of the changes in their personality or behavior and may not be able to control their feelings. The person may have 'good' and 'bad' days or even 'good' and 'bad' times during the course of one day.





## 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 be patient.



**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."*

➔ Judith's daughter is concerned that her mother 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 but now she has angry outbursts.

*"The last time we were in for a visit, Mom told us that she had given away her bracelet to another resident."*

➔ The family has noticed that Judith 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 survivor's position helps them feel understood and valued. Use patience and provide praise for successes.

**Emotional Lability**

- Ask if what the person is showing on the outside matches how he/she is feeling on the inside
- Try distraction. Call the person's name or ask an unrelated question
- Encourage the person to slow down and take deep breaths
- Explain that loss of emotional control is common. Do not tell the person to stop behaviour as that could lead to further frustration.

**Social Isolation**

- Involve the person in their care
- Learn what brings enjoyment
- Encourage participation in favourite activities. Overcome barriers to participation.
- Offer the chance to talk about life experiences and memories
- Refer to a recreation therapist

**Social Judgment**

- Avoid situations that require decision making beyond their capabilities
- Give time and choice. Be patient.
- Reminder that fatigue can be a trigger. Provide for rest.
- Give feedback and cues to assist in recognizing inappropriate behaviour and discuss appropriate alternatives (do not criticize)
- Discuss social expectations with the person before entering social situations
- Recognize and praise appropriate actions

**Anger & Aggression**



- Look for causes/triggers of anger and share what works to diffuse the anger
- Assess for and treat pain
- To help prevent outbursts:
  - Identify and avoid triggers
  - Learn and follow the person'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
- If an outburst occurs:
  - Redirect attention elsewhere such as to a favourite activity
  - Move the person to a quiet area
  - Speak in a quiet calm manner using a low tone
  - Stay safe. If the person becomes violent, provide space & seek help.
- For those with communication difficulties:
  - Use communication boards/books
  - Tell them "I know that you understand"

**Apathy**

- Learn, reinforce and support the person'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 person to participate

Consider a referral to social work or other counselling.

**For More Information :** [www.strokenetworkseo.ca](http://www.strokenetworkseo.ca)

For more information and resources on stroke best practices, please contact:  
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