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 in inappropriate situations)

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

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

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

Social Judgment
- Difficulties saying and doing the right thing in a situation
- Personality changes
  - 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.

For more information and resources on stroke best practices, please contact:
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Stroke Can Cause Changes in Behaviour

Behaviour changes may be the result of learning to cope with a life-changing event & the resulting 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 will be appreciated.

Judith is a stroke survivor. Since her stroke she is having difficulties 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 favorite 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 talkative 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 disproportionately.

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 the person is feeling down or disconnected from you.
- 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 this could lead to further frustration.

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

Social Judgment
- Avoid situations that require decision-making beyond their capabilities.
- Encourage participation in activities.
- Give breaks.
- Remind the fatigue can be a trigger for aggression.
- Provide for rest.
- Use feedback and cues to assist in recognizing inappropriate behavior and discuss appropriate alternatives (do not criticize).
- Discuss social expectations with the person before entering social situations.
- Recognize and praise appropriate actions.

Consider a referral to social work or other counselling.


STROKE NETWORK of Southeastern Ontario