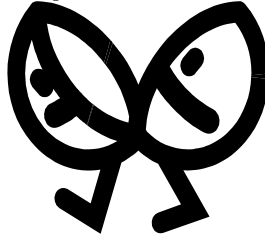


Tip Sheet #12



Dealing with the Stroke Survivor's Changed Personality

Changes in personality are common after a stroke:

Damage to parts of the brain that control emotions can cause personality changes. The type, size, and location of the stroke may determine the survivor's personality change. Below are a few points to consider:

- Stroke survivors may demonstrate emotionally extreme behaviors
- The survivor may seem like a totally different person
- The personality change may be related to frustration from the stroke
- Personality changes often seem strange and random

Caregivers should not take things personally. Changes in personality are most often due to the stroke.

What are personality changes that some stroke survivors may have?

• **Emotional lability:** Defined as sudden changes in mood that might not match a person's emotions. For example, a survivor might start laughing when they are stressed or upset about something. A survivor might begin crying when talking about something positive. A survivor might suddenly yell or lose their temper for no apparent reason. These displays of emotion are sometimes different from what they are actually thinking or feeling. The survivor might not be able to control their laughing, crying, or anger in social situations.

- Discuss with the survivor, how they would like to be treated when these emotions occur. Some survivors may want you to:
 - Treat it as an inconvenience (like a sneeze or hiccup) and continue with the conversation. Avoid drawing attention to it.

- Touch on the arm or hand or empathy if crying seems like it is the real emotion... “It looks like you are frustrated” or “I know this is hard for you.”
- Acknowledge their behaviors... “Looks like you may be angry about this.”
- Talk with the survivor at a time when they are not experiencing these emotions to see how they would prefer you handle it.
- Teach other family members and friends how to handle it when it happens.
- **Anger:** being upset when usually calm or calm when usually upset
 - Stroke survivors who were previously calm, gentle mannered and loving may be VERY angry.
 - Stroke survivors who were previously very angry, may be agreeable and cheerful
- **Depression:** a form of hopelessness and disrupts an individuals' ability to function.
 - Signs of depression include:
 - Little interest or pleasure in doing things
 - Feeling down or hopeless
 - Trouble falling asleep or sleeping too much
 - Feeling tired and having little energy
 - Poor appetite or overeating
 - Feeling bad about yourself
 - Trouble concentrating on things
 - Moving or speaking so slow (or so fast) that other people notice
 - Thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way.
- **Additional personality changes:** (survivors may or may not experience these issues)
 - Feelings of caution
 - Feelings of anxiety
 - Act completely out of character
 - No interest or awareness of what is going on (like they are in

a zone of their own... physically here, but not mentally).

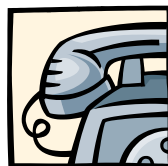
- Acting self-centered or showing no concern for the caregiver.

The above personality changes can be a natural response to stroke, or they can be from the damage caused by the stroke.

What can I, as a caregiver, do to help the stroke survivor with changes in personality?

- Emotional lability and anger strategies:
 - Clarify the real emotion
 - Ask the stroke survivor to describe how he is feeling and compare to the demonstrated behavior
 - Change the topic of conversation
 - Distract the survivor
 - Give the survivor a chance to collect themselves or to go through their thoughts.
- Depression strategies:
 - Seek treatment from a medical professional such as doctor, psychologist, or counselor
 - Antidepressant medication with medical supervision
 - Psychotherapy or counseling
- General personality change strategies:
 - Involve family and friends with treatment options
 - Family member participation in support groups and therapies
 - Encouragement and motivation
 - Involvement in activities of daily living

Do not blame yourself for the stroke survivor's personality changes. Most often, personality changes of stroke survivors are caused by damage to the brain from the stroke. They are not because of the caregiver. How you approach the emotion or behavior can make a difference.



When do I need to contact a professional?

Contact your doctor, nurse, psychologist or social worker if you notice any of the following:

- Sudden personality changes you cannot explain
- Increased signs of depression, hopelessness, worthlessness
- Serious mood changes lasting more than a few days
- Social isolation
- Thoughts about death or suicidal thoughts

Where do I find more information about helping my stroke survivor with personality changes?

Take a look at the following tip sheets in this notebook if needed:

- **Tip Sheet #9** Dealing with the Stroke Survivor's Emotions
- **Tip Sheet #10** Dealing with the Stroke Survivor's Feelings about Himself or Herself
- **Tip Sheet #13** Dealing with the Stroke Survivor's Problems with Thinking
- **Tip Sheet #11** Dealing with Difficult Behaviors
- **Tip Sheet #27** Dealing with my own emotions while providing care.
- **Skill-Building Tip Sheet #SB5. Communicating with health professionals**
- Call your doctor, nurse, neuropsychologist/psychologist or social worker
- Call the American Stroke Association's Toll-Free Warmline: 1-800 478-7653 or log onto their website: www.StrokeAssociation.org
- Call the American Stroke Association at 1-800-STROKES (1-800-787-6537) or log onto their website: www.stroke.org
- Call the Family Caregiver Alliance 1-800-445-8106 or log onto their website: www.caregiver.org
- Look for these books in your local library or bookstore.

Mace, N.L. & Rabins, P.V. (2017). The 36-Hour Day: A guide to caring for persons with Alzheimer's Disease, Related Dementing Illnesses, and

Memory Loss in Later Life. (6th Edition). Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press. 1-800-537-5487.

Burkman, K. (1998). *The Stroke Recovery Book: A Guide for Patients and Families*. Omaha, NB: Addicus Books, Inc. This book's ISBN is #1-886039-30-5.