

Tip Sheet #10



Dealing With the Stroke Survivor's Feelings About Himself or Herself

Following a stroke, caregivers may notice a variety of feelings that the stroke survivor has...

What are common feelings that some stroke survivors may have?

- **Dependency or helplessness:** Feeling like they must depend on their caregiver or others for most everything they do. Feeling like they are helpless or cannot do anything by themselves. Feeling like they have no control over their life.
- **Hopelessness or depression:** Extreme sadness over what they have lost as a result of the stroke. Feelings that nothing will get better. Extreme hopelessness can be a sign of depression. Suicidal thoughts are also a possibility.
- **Fear or anxiety:** Feeling like they do not know what to expect in the future. Will their stroke get worse? Will they ever be able to do what they used to? Will they have another stroke?
- **Frustration or anger:** Feeling like no matter how hard they try, they cannot do what they used to. They may be angry about what has happened and what they have lost.
- **Worthlessness:** Feelings like they are useless or that they are no longer important now that they have had a stroke. Poor self-esteem and having a negative self-image are also common. Feeling like they can no longer do anything to help themselves or others. Feeling like no one will love them.

- **Depression:** Is a form of hopelessness and can affect an individuals' ability to function. It is a feeling commonly experienced by stroke survivors.
- Signs of depression include:
 - Little interest or pleasure in doing things
 - Feeling down, depressed, 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.



As a caregiver, how can I help with the feelings the stroke survivor has?

Take a look at **Tip Sheet #9 Dealing with the Stroke Survivor's Emotions.** This tip sheet will help you to:

- Identify emotions the survivor is having
- Screen the survivor for symptoms of depression
- Figure out who to call for help
- Learn some strategies the survivor can use to help with their emotions.

Also, help the survivor work through the **workbook toward the beginning of this notebook entitled, "Skill-Building Tip Sheet #SB6. Stress Management Workbook for Caregivers and Survivors."** This workbook will help the survivor to:

- Realize that thoughts are different from emotions
- Look at the thoughts they are having
- Revise their thoughts to be more realistic and positive
- Use strategies to help them manage their stress

Here are some other strategies you can try:

- Learn and recognize the stroke survivor's limitations and allow them appropriate recovery time.
- Try to reach agreement with the survivor on what they can do and what the caregiver can do. Try to work together as a team.
- Openly discuss how both the survivor's role and the caregiver's role has changed. Ask the survivor about his or her feelings. Share your feelings.
- Try to create a "new normal." Talk about what the survivor can do to adjust to his or her new role. Talk about what the caregiver can do to adjust to his or her new role. How can you help one another?
- Attend therapy sessions (physical, occupational, speech, recreation therapy) to see what the survivor is able to do. **Caregivers often say that this is the most important thing that they can do to help the survivor.** If caregivers do not attend therapy sessions, they have no idea what the survivor can really do.
- **Avoid doing things for the survivor that they can do on their own.** For example, if they can put on their own shirt, but it is difficult and takes a long time, give them the time and encourage them to do it. Provide what they need to get started, then, leave them alone to do the task themselves. This will help with the survivor's dignity and self-esteem.

Here is a quote from a spouse caregiver.

"I was helping him too much...They were telling me, "Let him do things for himself." Well, it seems like it was such a struggle for him to do anything, that it was so much easier for me to help him get dressed when they weren't looking and things like that, which I shouldn't have done. When he came home, he was

dependent on me. But you know when you're married for 40 something years, I'd rather help him than have him struggle. I guess I was wrong in doing that."

- Provide LOTS of positive feedback for the survivor's efforts.

Positive encouragement "You can do this." "You will learn how to do this better the more you try." "Hang in there, you are getting better every day." "You are much better at this than you were last week." Assure the survivor, "We can deal with this stroke together."

Make a victory list of successes. Keep a list of accomplishments as they occur. "There's another one for our victory list of successes!"

Patience. "We have plenty of time." "Keep working at it."

Love and support. "I'm really impressed with how far you have come." "It really means a lot to me to see you getting better." "You are working so hard. I am proud of you."

- Read an article or book together about another stroke survivor's experiences. **See Tip Sheet #8 Resources for a list of references of personal stories of stroke survivors.** Reading about other's experiences can help.
- Treat the stroke survivor with dignity and respect. Avoid treating the survivor like a child.
- Avoid taking over the life of the stroke survivor. Try to give the stroke survivor something to live for today. **Give the survivor choices** regarding daily activities (e.g. clothes to wear, what to eat)

When do I need to contact a professional?



Do not be afraid to ask for professional help from the doctor or others involved in their care. Negative thoughts and emotions can be very difficult to control. **Medications and psychological counseling are often prescribed, and are very effective.** It is far better to seek treatment than to allow the downward spiral of depression interfere with stroke recovery.

Place an X beside all of those below who you think you can seek help from.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ 911 if an Emergency | ☐ Crises/Suicide line 1-800-273-8255 |
| ☐ Stroke survivor's doctor | ☐ https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org |
| ☐ Caregiver's doctor | ☐ ASA Warmline 1-888-4-STROKE |
| ☐ Psychiatrist | ☐ Mental health clinic |
| ☐ Neurologist | ☐ Local hospital |
| ☐ Neuropsychologist | ☐ Support group |
| ☐ Psychologist | ☐ Other stroke survivors |
| ☐ Counselor | ☐ Other caregivers |
| ☐ Priest or Pastor | ☐ Family and Friends |
| ☐ Nurse | ☐ Other _____ |

Write the telephone numbers for each of the above that you put an X by. Look in the yellow pages in your telephone book under "Mental Health" or "Hospitals" for more help.

More places we can seek professional help _____

Where do I find more information about helping my stroke survivor deal with their feelings after a stroke?

See Tip Sheet #8 Where to find Resources. Survivors tend to withdraw from friends and family. Think about attending a stroke support group. A list of stroke support groups is provided at the end of Tip Sheet #8.

Call the American Stroke Association's Toll-Free Warmline: 1-800 478-7653 or log onto their website: www.StrokeAssociation.org

Call the National 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 the
website: www.caregiver.org

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

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.

Senelick, R. & Dougherty, K. (2001). *Living With Stroke: A Guide for Families*. Birmingham, AL: HealthSouth Press.
(This book's ISBN number is #189152510-7)

Books are available on Amazon.com, at your local bookstore,
or public library

References:

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the first six months after discharge. *Journal of Neuroscience Nursing*,
34(5), 242-251.

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