

Tip Sheet #16



Keeping the Stroke Survivor Socially Active

A stroke survivor can lose touch with friends and family. Trying to maintain a social life after stroke can be very difficult for some survivors. Family and friends may appear right after the stroke, but then they seem to drop off as time goes by. Some friends may never be seen again. There are many possible reasons why the stroke survivor's social life begins to disappear.

Put an X beside the things below that you think apply.

- ☐ The survivor was never really very social
- ☐ The survivor is too busy with therapy and recovery
- ☐ The survivor feels uncomfortable around others
- ☐ The survivor has trouble talking or understanding
- ☐ The survivor forgets names and events
- ☐ The survivor has trouble keeping up with conversation
- ☐ The survivor seems to want to withdraw or is depressed
- ☐ The survivor is irritable or angry with others, or uses foul language
- ☐ The survivor is very bitter and upset about the stroke
- ☐ The survivor refuses to have visitors
- ☐ The caregiver is too busy to arrange visits with friends and family
- ☐ The caregiver was never really very social
- ☐ The caregiver is depressed or wants to withdraw
- ☐ The caregiver is irritable or angry with others
- ☐ Friends and family are too busy to visit or call
- ☐ Friends and family feel uncomfortable about the stroke
- ☐ Friends and family have trouble understanding the survivor
- ☐ Friends and family don't know how to help
- ☐ Friends and family are depressed
- ☐ Friends and family are irritable or angry with others
- ☐ Friends and family try to avoid the survivor and caregiver
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Other _____

As you can see, there are many reasons why a survivor's social life may suffer after a stroke. Look back through the list of possible reasons, then see if you can come up with some possible solutions. For example:

If the survivor was really never very social, you might want to try starting out with just one visitor at a time. Someone who the survivor knows and was comfortable with before the stroke. Try to start out with small outings at first. A walk in the yard, visit to helpful relatives, later a trip to the mall, perhaps eventually a vacation or cruise to Alaska.

If the survivor is too busy with therapy and recovery, try making a schedule of their weekly activities, then put some time aside for a social activity. Are there any activities in their schedule now that are not that important? Can they be dropped to make time for something fun, or for a social activity? Where on the calendar can you insert a social activity?



If the survivor has trouble talking or understanding others, teach friends and family about how to communicate with the survivor. See **Tip Sheet #14 Communicating with the Stroke Survivor**. Interpret what the survivor is saying for friends and family.

If the survivor seems to want to withdraw or is depressed, check out **Tip Sheet #9 Dealing with the Stroke Survivor's Emotions**. This tip sheet helps you identify the survivor's emotions, screen them for depressive symptoms, and gives you ideas on where to find help. There are also some strategies to relieve stress in Tip Sheet #10.

If the survivor is irritable or angry or uses foul language, explain to friends and family ahead of time how to deal with these behaviors and how they can look beyond them. Check out **Tip Sheet #11 Dealing with Difficult Behaviors** for strategies that you can teach friends and family.

If the caregiver is too busy to arrange visits with friends and family, check out **Skill-Building Tip Sheet #SB3. Maintaining realistic schedule and expectations**. This tip sheet will also help you to get rid of expectations of yourself that are too high.

If friends and family are uncomfortable about the stroke, take the time to teach them about stroke, what has happened, and how they can help. Be specific in asking them what they can do. Invite them over to watch a movie with the survivor or play a game or just visit.

If friends and family avoid the survivor, you might try calling them and inviting them over. Sometimes people will drop off completely or just stop coming. There is not much you can do about that. You can make new friends however! Fellow survivors and caregivers you meet during rehabilitation are usually great choices.

Consider joining a stroke support group. Getting together with others who are dealing with stroke is often very helpful. New relationships are formed. Advice and suggestions can be shared both ways. **A list of stroke support groups is provided at the end of Tip Sheet #8 Where to find resources.**

If getting out of the house is difficult, check out **Tip Sheet #25 Going Places with the Stroke Survivor.** Transportation can be arranged ahead of time. Tickets in the handicap section to events can be obtained. Just getting out of the house is very important.



- If a spiritual life is part of your routine, let your congregation or spiritual community know how they can help. Maintain your spiritual life.
 - Plan with your family and friends how to get to church, temple or house of worship.
 - Call members of your congregation or spiritual community to come visit you and the survivor
 - Take the opportunity to nourish your spirit, focus beyond the immediate situation, and make contact with people outside of the house.

Fill out the worksheet on the following pages for more ideas.

Possible list of activities: Put an X beside ideas that would work for the survivor. Add more ideas.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Call to talk with a family member | ☐ Go to a support group |
| ☐ Call to talk with a friend | ☐ Go to a community program |
| ☐ Invite a family member over | ☐ like senior citizens or YMCA |
| ☐ Invite a friend over | ☐ class of some sort. |
| ☐ Visit a family member | ☐ Try out an art class |
| ☐ Visit a friend | ☐ Look for volunteer activities |
| ☐ Go to a movie | ☐ (Check with local hospitals |
| ☐ Go shopping | ☐ for volunteer activities) |
| ☐ Go out to eat | ☐ Go to church |
| ☐ Go to a local festival | ☐ Call a church for peer visits |
| ☐ Take a walk or wheelchair ride | ☐ Get tickets to a sports game |
| ☐ outside | ☐ Get tickets to a play or |
| ☐ Talk with neighbors | ☐ musical event |
| ☐ Arrange a game night | ☐ Check into adult day care |
| ☐ Email friends or family | ☐ Look for support groups |
| ☐ Try instant messaging with | ☐ on the internet |
| ☐ kids or grandkids on the computer or smartphone | |

Other ideas? Brainstorm. Anything that comes to mind. List them...

List activities the survivor would like to try:

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

Pick 3 to try now. List them in the table on the next page and begin planning.

Top 3 Social Activities to try now:	Who to call and notes on how to plan (need tickets, transportation, etc.).	Date and time for activity.
1.	Name(s): Phone: Plans:	Date: Time:
2.	Name(s): Phone: Plans:	Date: Time:
3.	Name(s): Phone: Plans:	Date: Time:

When do I need to contact a professional about keeping the survivor socially active?

- Call the doctor if you think the survivor is depressed, or if you are depressed. Medications and counseling are very effective.
- If you and your survivor are having trouble talking about the need to be with people, a professional could help.

Where do I find more information about keeping the survivor socially active? **Check out the following tip sheets:**

- **Tip Sheet #25 Going Places with the Stroke Survivor**
- **Skill-Building Tip Sheet #SB3. Maintaining realistic schedule and expectations** to see how to make extra time for activities.
- **Tip Sheet #14 Communicating with the Stroke Survivor** to teach family and friends strategies for communication.
- **Tip Sheet #9 Dealing with the Stroke Survivor's Emotions While Providing Care** if you think the survivor is depressed.
- **Tip Sheet #27 Dealing with my Own Emotions While Providing Care** if you are depressed or want to withdraw.
- **Tip Sheet #11 Dealing with Difficult Behaviors** if the survivor is angry and irritable, or uses foul language. Teach friends and family members strategies for dealing with behaviors.
- **Tip Sheet #8 Where to Find Resources** This tip sheet gives you information on several reading materials and organizations that can help. There is also a list of personal stories written by stroke survivors and caregivers that are interesting to read.
- **Join a support group either in person or online.** There is a list of stroke support groups at the end of **Tip Sheet #8 Where to find resources.**