

Cognitive Communication Disorders – a fact sheet for people with a cognitive communication disorder, their families, and friends

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

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The information in this document is currently in development and has been shared as part of a consultation. If you are seeking guidance or information on this topic, please ensure you refer to final published content which can be found on rcslt.org.

We appreciate any comments provided to us during the consultation, all of which will be reviewed by the working group within the context and scope of the project. We ask that, where possible and relevant, you accompany any counter arguments to statements made in the document with supporting evidence e.g. a research reference.

Members of the working group should not be contacted directly, and all feedback should be made through the assigned route e.g. via survey or project manager. Feedback made through unassigned routes or after the closing date will not be accepted or responded to.

Thank you for your support with this project.

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What are cognitive communication disorders?

Communication is a complex process. We use our 'cognitive skills' to help us communicate. Cognitive skills are the skills we use to think, learn, remember, solve problems, and pay attention.

When someone has a brain injury or neurological condition, these skills can be affected. This can lead to difficulties with understanding, speaking, reading, writing, and conversation. This is known as a cognitive communication disorder.

What are the signs of a cognitive communication disorder?

Every person is different, but common signs include:

- difficulty focusing on or remembering what others say
- talking more than usual, going off topic, or giving too much detail
- talking less, leaving out details, or struggling to think of things to say
- speaking in a way that feels disorganised or out of character
- trouble picking up on clues about what others are thinking or feeling
- challenges with reading and writing
- fluctuating skills depending on fatigue, stress, or environment
- not always being aware of the communication changes.

What problems can cognitive communication disorders cause?

Communication is central to daily life. If it becomes more difficult due to a cognitive communication disorder:

- relationships can change and become harder to maintain
- school and work can become more difficult
- people may avoid social activities or hobbies
- confidence, wellbeing, and quality of life may be affected
- both the person and their family may feel isolated, sad, frustrated, or anxious.

Possible causes

Cognitive communication disorders can be experienced by people with a range of

conditions. This can include brain injury, stroke, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, motor neurone disease, dementia, and long COVID.

How can speech and language therapy help?

Speech and language therapists (SLTs) support people with cognitive communication disorders, their families, and friends by:

- identifying how communication has changed
- providing advice and education
- helping the person, and those supporting them, decide what they want to work on and how to do it
- supporting improvements to confidence and quality of life.

GPs, healthcare staff, social workers, and teachers can refer to SLT services.

What can people with a cognitive communication disorder do to help their communication?

Different strategies will help different people. Some things to try are:

- take your time
- prepare things you want to say (and write them down)
- stay focussed on the topic
- try not to speak to too many people at once
- check that people are following you
- look at other people's facial expression and body language. Invite them to speak when they want to.

How can family and friends help?

Every person with a cognitive communication disorder is different, however some strategies to try are:

- use clear, straight-forward language
- allow time and silence to enable the person to consider what you are saying and respond
- check that you have been clear
- gently highlight if they've gone off topic, if you would like to say something, or if you have not understood
- be prepared to give options if they can't answer your questions straight away.

More information is available on the RCSLT public webpage [link added once published]