

Cognitive Communication Disorders

Information for people with a cognitive communication disorder, their families, and friends

What are cognitive communication disorders?

Communicating is complex. Cognitive skills are the skills we use to think, attend, remember, and problem-solve. When a child or adult 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 (CCD).



What are the signs of a cognitive communication disorder?

Every person is different, but common signs include:

- difficulty understanding, 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, writing, and learning
- fluctuating skills depending on fatigue, emotions, or place.

People with CCD may not always be aware of their communication changes.

CCD in children and young people can emerge and increase over time as cognitive processes fail to develop as expected. This delayed onset can make it hard to relate current difficulties to a past diagnosis.

What can help...

1. Speech and language therapy

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 decide what to work on and how to do it
- supporting increased confidence and quality of life.

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

2. Strategies

Different strategies help different people. Try:

- taking your time
- preparing things you want to say (and writing them down)
- to stay focussed on the topic
- not speaking to too many people at once
- checking that people are understanding you
- monitoring other people's facial expression and body language to invite them to speak
- using compensatory aids such as electronic reminders and notes.

3. Family and friends

It can be difficult to address communication changes, and everyone is different. Try:

- using clear and straight-forward language
- giving enough time and silence to enable the person to process, think and respond
- checking that you have been clear
- gently highlighting if they've gone off topic, if you would like to say something, or if you have not understood
- being prepared to give options if they struggle to answer your questions.

What problems can cognitive communication disorders cause?

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

- conversations can be challenging as its harder to stay on track
- relationships can change and become harder to maintain
- school and work can become more difficult
- people may avoid talking, social activities or hobbies
- confidence, wellbeing, and quality of life may be affected
- the person and their family may feel isolated, sad, frustrated, or anxious
- keeping up with modern-day communication can become harder, eg forms, social media, emails.

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, leukodystrophies, and long COVID.

For more information visit
[rcslt.org](https://www.rcslt.org)