Communication Skills with Right Brain Injury

A person with right brain injury has damage to the right side of the brain. This damage may be from a stroke, traumatic brain injury or brain tumor. A person with a right brain injury has problems with thinking skills, but may not be aware of the problems that he or she is having.

Common problems with right brain injury

- Problems expressing and understanding information:
  - Says a lot, but lacks a main idea.
  - Brings up subjects out of the blue.
  - Hard time following long instructions.
  - Hard time understanding indirect requests and humor.

- Changes in interactions with others:
  - Loses eye contact.
  - Changes the topic without warning.
  - Interrupts other people talking.
  - Talks too much or not much at all.

- Flat tone of voice or no facial expression.

- Not being aware of objects on left side. This may make it hard to:
  - Read or write.
  - Look at a person seated to the left.

- Trouble paying attention.
- Trouble keeping track of time.
- Trouble learning new information and remembering recent events.
- Forgetting steps in everyday activities.
- Unable to “see the whole picture”.
- Acts without thinking and with poor judgment.
Ways to help

Conversation
- Get rid of distractions. Turn off the TV, close the door or face the left side of the person toward the distraction.
- Signal to get attention before talking and remind him or her to look at you.
- Use reminders to get back on topic.
- Ask questions that need more than a yes or no answer.
- Use gestures or spoken reminders to signal your turn to talk.

Visual Skills
- Use reminders to help find landmarks.
- Encourage looking left to right.
- Use an index card or finger to focus attention on one line at a time reading.

Thinking Skills
- Give extra time to learn new things.
- Use mental images or associations.
- Describe ideas when the person is unable to think of a certain word.
- Use written reminders.
- Verbally remind the person.
- Talk through the steps of an activity.
- Remind the person to slow down.
- Stay calm and relaxed.

Orientation
- Use clocks and calendars.
- Keep a daily schedule or use checklists.
- Point out familiar landmarks.