

# Speech and Language Therapy Department

## Cognitive Communication Difficulties Information Leaflet

You have been given this leaflet because someone you know has cognitive communication difficulties. This leaflet will explain the possible symptoms of a cognitive communication difficulty and what you can do to help.

### What are cognitive communication difficulties?

Communication is a highly complex skill which forms part of cognition.

Cognition is the term for the mental processes which occur in the brain. These processes include language, attention, memory and problem-solving. Cognition can be affected by changes in the brain. These changes can be caused by injury, disease or old age. Cognitive communication difficulties occur when one or more of these mental processes are affected.

As an example, a person with reduced attention may not know to listen when someone is talking to them. Therefore they may appear to not understand or not be interested in conversation.

Language difficulties (dysphasia) can co-occur with other cognitive communication difficulties. Sometimes it is difficult to tease apart whether someone's communication difficulties are due to dysphasia or a broader cognitive impairment.

### What are the symptoms of cognitive communication difficulties?

The symptoms of cognitive communication difficulties vary according to the nature of the cognitive processes affected. The person may:

- Be disorientated to time, place, person (e.g. they may not know the date/time, where they are or who they are speaking to)
- Find it difficult to talk about the "here and now"
- Often switch topics in conversation
- Seem easily distracted
- Find it hard to listen to conversation
- Have difficulty recalling conversations/events
- Frequently repeat themselves
- Produce seemingly inappropriate comments
- Be unable to process complex/abstract information

## **What can I do to help a person with cognitive communication difficulties?**

A person with a cognitive communication difficulty needs support and encouragement with their communication. Different techniques will help different people but friends and family can try:

- Minimising distractions
- Ensuring you talk directly to the person and not talk over them
- Establishing a consistent routine and environment where possible
- Gaining the person's attention before speaking to them
- Talking about familiar topics
- Encouraging the person to communicate
- Explaining what is happening as it happens e.g. "your brother has come to visit"
- Supporting verbal communication with props/objects
- Only asking one question at a time
- Gently reminding the person of the topic if they appear to have changed topic unexpectedly
- Taking a break if the conversation is "going round in circles"
- Facilitating choice making by asking simple yes/no questions (e.g. would you like tea?) or giving forced alternatives (e.g. would you like tea or coffee?)
- Keeping written reminders of important information e.g. writing key names and dates in a diary



### **Where can I go for more information?**

Your local speech and language therapist will be able to provide you with more information about cognitive communication difficulties

Details:

Speech and Language Therapy Department  
Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital  
Colney Lane, Norwich  
NR4 7UY

**Tel: 01603 287117**

## Useful Organisations

### **Alzheimers Society**

Provides information and support for those living with and caring for people with all types of dementia

Alzheimer's Society, Scott Lodge, Scott Road, Plymouth, PL2 3DU

Dementia Connect support line 0333 150 3456

Customer Care Team 0330 333 0804

Website: [www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)

### **Dementia UK**

Provides information and advice for those living with and caring for people with dementia

Head Office: Dementia UK Head Office, 7th Floor One Aldgate, London, EC3N 1RE

Tel: 020 8036 5400

[info@dementiauk.org](mailto:info@dementiauk.org)

Admiral Nurse Dementia Helpline 0800 888 6678 [helpline@dementiauk.org](mailto:helpline@dementiauk.org)

Website: [www.dementiauk.org](http://www.dementiauk.org)

### **Headway**

To promote understanding of all aspects of brain injury and provide information, support and services to survivors, their families and carers

Headway - the brain injury association, Bradbury House, 190 Bagnall Road, Old Basford Nottingham, NG6 8SF

Tel: 0115 924 0800

Fax: 0115 958 4446

Email: [enquiries@headway.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@headway.org.uk)

Helpline: 0808 800 2244 or [helpline@headway.org.uk](mailto:helpline@headway.org.uk)

Website: [www.headway.org.uk](http://www.headway.org.uk)

