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Brain Injury Series

Headway and people with a brain injury wrote this booklet.

Thank you to everybody who helped.

The design is based, wherever possible, on the ‘Accessible Information Guidelines for People with Aphasia’ by the Stroke Association (2012) www.stroke.org.uk

If you have any comments or suggestions contact Headway:

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Please note: You should not consider the information in this booklet as a substitute for getting advice from a Speech and Language Therapist or other professional.

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Communication

Communication is a two-way process.

Communication means understanding other people.

Communication means other people understanding you.

Communication also means taking in information.
How do we communicate?

We communicate:
by speaking

by listening

by reading and writing

and by seeing.
How do we communicate?

We communicate with body language.

Communication also uses thinking skills.

Communication uses social skills.

Examples of social skills are:

- Allowing other people to talk.
- Not saying things that may offend other people.
- Standing at the right distance from other people.
Common changes after a brain injury

1. **Changes** in language
   - Aphasia (page 5)

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3. **Changes** in Thinking skills (page 13)

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Aphasia

Aphasia affects language.

In most people the left side of the brain controls language.

Aphasia can affect:
- talking

Aphasia can affect:
- understanding
Aphasia can affect:
writing

reading

and using numbers.

Aphasia is different for different people.
Dysarthria

Dysarthria is a speech difficulty.

Dysarthria is caused by muscle weakness.

The muscle weakness is caused by nerve damage after a brain injury.

Your speech may be slurred.

Your speech may be quiet.

Your speech may be slow.
Apraxia of speech

Apraxia of speech is a difficulty coordinating the muscles used for speech.

You may mix up sounds in words.

Longer words are more difficult — for example:

It may help to break up longer words.
General tips to help your communication

Try the tips out. Use the tips that work.

Choose a quiet place to talk.

Turn off distractions in the background.

Talk one-to-one where possible.

Keep eye contact.

Ask the other person if they understand.
Try to **limit conversations** when you feel **tired**.

Use **pen** and **paper** or **drawings** and **pictures**.

Use **gestures**.

A smart phone, **ipad** or other **electronic device** may help. Get **advice** from a **Speech and Language Therapist**.

**Speech and language therapy**, **exercises** and **strategies** may help.
Tips for other people

Bear in mind that having a communication difficulty does not necessarily mean any change in a person’s intelligence.

Choose a quiet place.

Talk one-to-one when possible.

Face the person. Get their attention before talking.

Keep eye contact. This helps you both to know if communication is going well or not.

Speak clearly, without rushing.

Use short sentences.
Only ask one question at a time. Wait for the answer.

Ask ‘Yes’ / ‘No’ questions if necessary.

Be patient. Give enough time to respond.

Try not to finish their sentences.

Do not pretend to understand the person if you do not.

Repeat back what you think they meant. Ask if this is correct.

If needed, try other ways to communicate: gestures, pictures, pen and paper or any devices the person uses to communicate.
Thinking skills and communication

A brain injury may affect thinking skills.

Thinking skills may affect communication. Common difficulties are:

Forgetting what you said or did.

Switching from one subject to another.

Getting ‘stuck’ on one subject.
Needing **more time to take in what is being said.**

**Not** being **able to realise** when **someone** is **joking** or being **sarcastic.**
Thinking skills and communication — tips that may help you

Ask if you are repeating yourself.

Ask for feedback.

If someone changes to a new topic, stick with the new topic.
Tips for friends and family

Try to maintain eye contact.

Give the person enough time to respond.

If they get stuck on a topic, ask a question to change the topic.

Avoid sarcasm if the person tends to take things literally.
Social skills and communication

The brain’s Frontal Lobes control social skills.

An injury to the Frontal Lobes can affect social skills.

Social skills affect communication.

Some difficulties after a brain injury are:
Saying things that may offend others. Being overly familiar.

Interrupting other people. Talking too much.

Not noticing other people’s body language for example: someone fidgeting if they want to leave.
Tips that may help you

Try to keep eye contact. Keeping eye contact may help you notice other people’s reactions.

Be open to getting feedback about your social skills.

Tips for friends and family

If the person is talking too much, try to change the topic of the conversation.

If they have behaved in a socially unacceptable way, they may be unaware they have. Give them feedback discreetely and in private.
Help and information

Speech and Language therapy may help.
Ask your **GP** or **Public Health Nurse** about a **HSE Speech and Language therapist**.

☎ 1850 24 1850  🌐 www.hse.ie

For a **private Speech and Language Therapist**, contact the **Independent Speech-Language Therapists of Ireland**.

🌐 www.isti.ie

Aphasia Ireland

Their goal is to raise awareness of aphasia and offer support.

📞 (01) 7642 200  🌐 www.aphasiaireland.ie
You can also contact Headway Information and Support staff.

1890 200 278
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See headway.ie/information for further details.