

Cognitive communication difficulties

What are they?

Communication is a highly complex skill which relies on lots of these different thinking skills and processes working together.



Having a good conversation with someone involves thinking, knowing and remembering things.

If you have cognitive communication difficulties, then you may find it harder to use language **socially** and in conversations with others.

This is separate to problems with finding words or saying them clearly. This means that cognitive communication difficulties can happen on its own, or alongside other problems with speech and language.

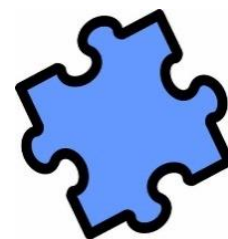
What causes it?



- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Stroke
- Hypoxic Brain Damage (a shortage of oxygen in the brain)
- Dementia
- Brain Tumours

What thinking skills are affected?

- ❖ **Attention** - being able to concentrate and not get distracted
- ❖ **Memory** - remembering recent events
- ❖ **Organisation/planning** – arranging ideas into order and dealing with routine and non-routine activities
- ❖ **Information processing** – quick thinking and understanding
- ❖ **Reasoning and problem solving** – Logically thinking through problems and finding solutions to these problems
- ❖ **Impulsivity** – not being aware of danger/consequences, interrupting conversation
- ❖ **Social behaviour** – acting appropriately with other people, e.g. responding when spoken to, appropriate levels of friendliness with strangers.



Another thinking skill that is often affected is **reduced awareness of the problem. This is sometimes called “insight”**. The person may believe they are acting ‘normally’ and exactly as they would have done before. They may not be able to understand or accept that the way they communicate has changed.

This means that it can be difficult to work on these difficulties with communication if the person is unable to realise or accept they exist.

What do cognitive communication difficulties look like?

Cognitive communication difficulties can be different for everybody, but some **common** difficulties are:

- ❖ **Concentrating during conversations, reading and writing**

- 'Zoning out' or missing parts of the conversation because they were distracted

- ❖ **Understanding and remembering what is said, especially with long, complex or abstract language**

- Not remembering having certain conversations. The listener may also have to repeat things several times to get an answer.

- ❖ **Talking at length about one thing**

- Talking about one particular topic they are interested in. This can get in the way of other conversations you want to have.

- ❖ **Altered turn-taking skills – talking too much, interrupting or not speaking when they should**

- Overly talkative and 'hogging' the conversation or doesn't realise that it is their turn to speak

- ❖ **Swearing, talking about inappropriate topics or childish behaviour**

- Swearing more than usual or sharing things that normally they would not share. This might get in the way of conversation and upset others.

- ❖ **Altered ability to give information in an orderly and organised way**

- Giving information without telling the listener the backstory or any context. Also, assuming the listener know things that they don't (e.g. information about a TV show they didn't watch).



What can we do to help?

- ❖ **Write** down appointments and important information
- ❖ Use **simpler language** as this can be easier to understand
- ❖ Keep your **sentences short** and include **key words**
- ❖ Allow enough **time** for the person to process what you said and respond
- ❖ If you feel like your conversation is going round in circles, then either
- ❖ **Take a break** or gently remind the person of the topic.
- ❖ **Give feedback** and confirm when you have and haven't understood
- ❖ **Reduce distractions** in the room when having a conversation (e.g. turn off the TV)

