

## Some Things You Can Do to Help Communicate with the Person who has a Brain Injury

- Treat him/her with respect and remember the person is as intelligent but perhaps less efficient
- Minimize distractions while talking to the person such as turning off the TV, and/or radio, and closing the door
- Make sure you have the person's attention before speaking
- Have one person at a time talk to the person
- Pause after each point and allow the person adequate time to process spoken information
- Repeat spoken information as often as needed
- State things directly and avoid use of abstract language such as sayings, jokes, asides, proverbs, or figures of speech
- Encourage the person to write information down to help him/her remember it
- Summarize the key points of an important discussion on a piece of paper and give it to the person
- Encourage the person to note key appointments or messages in a daily planner
- Allow the person to use a tape recorder, calculator, computer etc as needed
- Give the person one activity at a time to do
- Give the person as much responsibility as they can handle
- Provide feedback gently regarding cognitive-communication difficulties
- Suggest what the person might try next time rather than focusing on what they did wrong

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## LEARNING ABOUT...

# Acquired Brain Injury and Cognitive Communication

For additional information about Ontario's speech-language pathologists or audiologists, contact:

**Ontario Association of  
Speech-Language Pathologists and  
Audiologists (OSLA)**

Tel: 416-920-3676

Toll free: 1-800-718-OSLA(6752)

or visit [www.osla.on.ca](http://www.osla.on.ca)



## What is an Acquired Brain Injury?

An acquired brain injury is an injury to the brain some time after the person was born. In acquired brain injury, the person's condition is not expected to get worse over time.

## What Difficulties Might One Experience after an Acquired Brain Injury?

A person may experience difficulties in the following areas:

- Attention
- Awareness
- Memory
- Learning
- Organization
- Orientation
- Information processing
- Reasoning
- Social skills
- Speech/pronunciation
- Voice
- Eating/swallowing
- Self-inhibiting
- Word finding
- Understanding
- Reading
- Writing
- Goal setting
- Self-initiating

The problems may or may not be subtle. They may be apparent immediately after the accident or at a later date.

## How can a Speech-Language Pathologist Assist?

Many people with an acquired brain injury have problems with thinking and this can interfere with their ability to communicate effectively. This is an example of a cognitive-communication difficulty. A speech-language pathologist can assess all aspects of the person's communication as well as cognitive thinking skills that may influence the person's communication. The speech-language pathologist can also assess swallowing. The important part of this assessment is to determine the extent to which these cognitive-communication difficulties may affect the person's return to work, school, family interactions and/or return to activities in the community. The speech-language pathologist then develops a treatment plan which lists therapy goals, procedures, and strategies to help the person and their family cope with the problem in manageable steps. Treatment may include:

- Educating the person with the injury and significant others about the nature of the person's strengths and weaknesses, and how to help the person cope
- Changing or modifying the environment – e.g. reducing background noise
- Providing exercises to improve cognitive-communication, speech, and/or swallowing skills

- Teaching strategies to help compensate for or deal with difficulties
- Providing opportunities to practice communicating in a variety of settings and situations
- Working with other professionals assisting the person (Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, Psychologists, Social Workers etc)

## How Can I Find a Speech-Language Pathologist?

- Ask your family doctor
- Call OSLA for the names of private practitioners in your area at 416-920-3676
- Contact the Ontario Brain Injury Association (1-800-263-5404) to see if they can recommend someone
- Contact your local hospital, rehabilitation centre, or Community Care Access Centre's rehabilitation departments to find out what services are in your area.