

INTERVENTIONS FOR PERSONS WITH RIGHT HEMISPHERIC BRAIN IMPAIRMENT

Suggestions for Helping Someone with Impairment in the Right Hemisphere of the Brain Shelly Weaverdyck

TYPES OF IMPAIRMENT

A person with right hemispheric brain impairment (due to a stroke, for example) may have difficulty with a variety of functions. Various factors determine which functions become impaired, including hemispheric dominance reflected in part by whether the person was born right or left handed.

Three types of possible impairments are briefly identified here, along with suggestions of interventions to try.

1. **Visuospatial:** This person may have difficulty noticing objects in all parts (but particularly in the left parts) of their visual field, accurately seeing how far away an object is from their own body, seeing where objects are relative to other objects, or knowing where all of their own body parts are. These difficulties in knowing where objects are may be subtle, so that even when a person can see the location of an object, they may be working very hard to do so. A person's ability to see where objects and people are may fluctuate or be unpredictable at any given moment.
2. **Emotional:** This person may have reduced control over their own emotions. They may get tearful or get angry and strike out unpredictably. The strength of their expression of emotion may not match the intensity with which they feel that emotion. For example, they may swear and strike out when they feel only mildly irritated. They may react emotionally, then later realize what they did and feel embarrassed or remorseful. They may also have difficulty recognizing emotions or empathizing with other people. There may be unexpected sexual behaviors, as well.
3. **Left sided body changes:** The left side of this person's body may be weaker, less coordinated, less well controlled, or even paralyzed. They may also be particularly sensitive to touch on all parts of their body, but particularly on their left side. A gentle touch on this person's arm for example, may feel to this person like pins and needles, a painful hit, intense heat or cold, or bugs crawling up their arm. It's also possible this person doesn't feel any touch on their left side or even realize their left side exists. For example, if you touch their left arm they may not know you are touching them. They may not recognize parts of their left side. If they see their left hand, for example, they may not know what it is or that it is theirs. They may forget their left side is weak or paralyzed. For example, they may try to walk when their left leg is paralyzed, and not understand why they can't walk.

INTERVENTION SUGGESTIONS

4. **See three handouts** "Visual-Spatial interventions", "Touch", and "Movement" for more detailed and specific intervention suggestions.
5. **Avoid underestimating this person's impairment** or expecting too much of them. Accurately assess what this person can and can't do. It is very easy to overestimate this person's abilities,

especially visuospatial abilities, since they can often talk quite well, clearly, and reasonably.

6. A person usually does not know what difficulties they are having, so asking them questions about what they can and can't do may not be helpful. Instead of asking questions, simply **try to make a task as easy as possible for them.**
7. **Help this person relax** and feel comfortable, especially while performing a task.
8. **Avoid taking this person's behavior or comments personally.** Remind yourself that they may be acting impulsively, may not believe what they are saying, or may not be thinking of you when they do or say something. Address the distress this person is feeling rather than focusing on their comments or behavior toward you.
9. **Avoid embarrassing or scolding this person.** They may not be able to control what they say or do, but later (maybe even immediately after) they may recognize their error or misjudgment and feel embarrassment or remorse. Sometimes they won't feel remorse, even when they reflect later on what they said or did impulsively. Again, avoid chiding or embarrassing them.
10. **Be compassionate, patient, and tolerant.** Avoid thinking this person is acting more impaired than they really are. For example, avoid thinking "She sees what she wants to see". Even when they talk reasonably, their ability to see or to perform tasks is likely quite impaired.
11. If you **return another time**, they may be able to function more easily. For example, they may be able to see the location of objects more easily, or the emotion they were expressing may have faded.
12. **Watch this person closely** to discern how they really feel, or how well they are seeing where objects, you, or other people are at this moment in time.
13. **Adjust your communication, the environment, and the task** to help them function or to see where objects and people are more easily, or to compensate for their reduced ability.
14. **Try to see from this person's perspective.** Watch for this person's reaction to see how your touch feels to them, or to see if they are accurately seeing where objects and your body are. Watch for confusion or anxiety due to misinterpretation of a situation or of objects or your movements.
15. **Modify your approach**, communication strategies, and movements in response to their reactions.
16. **Tell this person what you are doing** and going to do, especially when doing something on their weaker side.
17. **Approach this person from the stronger side.** Stand and talk to this person from the stronger side.
18. **Position this person** so their weaker side is against the wall when sitting or lying in bed.
19. Have their **stronger side face the activities**, radio, tv, etc.
20. **Hand objects**, such as clothing, or place objects, such as a plate with food, slightly **to their right**, or wherever they see best at this moment in time.
21. **Touch and move this person's stronger side** before touching or moving the weaker side.
22. When touching or moving this person's weaker side, **touch carefully** using suggestions from the "Touch" handout.
23. **Slow down.** Move slowly when approaching, touching, moving, or reaching toward this person.
24. **Reduce clutter and unnecessary objects and people** in the space around this person.
25. Have **only one person in this person's sight** when helping with a task. Try to have only one person assisting them at a time.
26. **Use contrast** to make objects stand out in the environment and from each other.
27. **Accommodate this person's fatigue.** They will need sleep and rest. They may get tired just sitting in the environment.