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Tip

Restoring language fluency and word-finding ability takes time, so be patient and encourage patience in your survivor. Improvement can't happen without practice. Keep the person in your care involved with language by going places; also encourage reading, writing, and speaking.

Technology May Help

There have been many advances in speech therapy, especially in the use of computer programs to deliver speech therapy at home. In addition, there are many augmentative communication devices, which means technology that is used to improve whatever communication capability a person has. Evaluation by a speech-language pathologist will assure that you get the right device or software.

Tip

The American Speech/Language and Hearing Association (ASHA) has produced a booklet to help you decide when a communication-improving device such as a hearing aid will help enhance communication. For a free copy of "Augmentative Communication for Consumers," contact the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), Phone: 800-638-8255 or 301-987-5700; <http://www.asha.org/>

Driving After Stroke

Beyond convenience and necessity, driving is important for a feeling of independence. Unfortunately, stroke can affect the areas of the brain that control the abilities necessary for driving, from perception and decision-making to reflexes and motor control. The ability to react quickly may be lost. Peripheral vision may be limited.

Paralysis, partial paralysis or weakness, and difficulty coordinating muscle movement (spasticity and ataxia) are some of the stroke conditions that can make it difficult to drive safely.

Because of these problems, driving after a stroke may be dangerous. Survivors and caregivers should carefully consider whether it would be safe for the survivor to drive again.

Safety is the primary concern, so it's important for you to be able to spot the signals that indicate driving may be unsafe. The American Stroke Association has identified these warning signs. Driving is dangerous when the survivor—

- drives too fast or too slow for road conditions or posted speeds
- needs help or instructions from passengers
- doesn't observe signs or signals
- makes slow or poor decisions about distance
- gets easily frustrated or confused
- gets lost often, even in familiar areas
- has accidents or close calls
- drifts across lane markings into other lanes

NOTE

Survivors may have difficulty noticing any difference in their driving ability since their stroke, even if the warning signs are obvious to others. Don't expect them to agree immediately to give up the keys.

If driving is determined to be a possibility for your survivor, here are some suggestions as to what to do to next.





- First step, talk to an occupational therapist. She can provide up-to-date information and a professional opinion on the survivor's capabilities.
- Next, contact your state's Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). Ask for the office of driver safety to get the requirements for survivors who want to drive.
- Finally, have your survivor tested. Professionals such as driver rehabilitation specialists can perform a reliable assessment of driving ability. A typical test will evaluate perception, functional ability, reaction time, and performance behind the wheel. Depending on your state's laws, your survivor may need to apply for a new driver's license.

Tip

When a survivor has completed physical and occupational rehab but still hasn't regained his or her driving abilities, a driver-retraining program may help. These programs can provide driving assessments, classroom instruction, and suggestions for modifying a vehicle with adaptive equipment. Check with your local rehab center or contact the Adaptive Driving Alliance (623-434-0722 or www.adamobility.com) to locate a program in your area.

Adapting a Vehicle

Your survivor may be able to drive safely if his vehicle is properly adapted. Some adaptive innovations include:

- A spinner knob for the steering wheel, which enables one-handed driving (Check with the DMV to make sure it's legal to use a knob in your state.)
- A left-foot gas pedal for survivors who cannot use their right foot

- Hand controls
- Wheelchair lifts and restraint systems for minivans

Tip

If your vehicle needs modifying, research costs and ask dealers about financial assistance programs. Nonprofit agencies sometimes offer grants to pay for modifications, and some health-insurance plans and workers' compensation programs offer financial assistance. Check with your state's department of vocational rehabilitation.

Once the vehicle is adapted, there are training requirements for operating an adapted vehicle. The equipment provider typically gives information on the use of your adapted vehicle, but the survivor will also need instruction from a qualified driving rehabilitation specialist. To locate a specialist in your area, contact the Association of Driver Rehabilitation Specialists at 1-800-290-2344 or www.aded.net.

Returning to Work After Stroke

For many stroke survivors, returning to work is the gold standard by which they measure their recovery. Younger survivors with children still at home may feel they have to help support a family. Survivors closer to retirement age may work because for them a job is more than money—it's self-esteem.

Survivors of working age don't easily give up on their careers. This is a common reaction. Survivors often judge their recovery status by their success in the structured and routine environment of therapy, but the work world is more complex and demanding.

