

# What's it like to have a communication disability?

*Please read the Important Notice on the reverse of this Fact Sheet.*

For 2.7 million Australians communication is a difficult and often frustrating experience. Getting their message across or understanding others is hard work because they have a communication disability. This can result in feelings of grief, anger, frustration and embarrassment.

## Who does it affect?

One in seven Australians has difficulties in communication. People with a communication disorder experience problems when talking to relatives and friends, as well as to strangers. Communication disabilities have an immediate effect on individuals as well as their families, friends, teachers, and work mates.

## What is the impact of a communication disability?

People are affected in different ways. There are some who keep quiet, choosing not to contribute to a conversation or work discussion. There are other people who may be unaware of their difficulties, however their communication disability may be apparent to families, friends and colleagues. The impact of a communication disability varies with age, severity, the type of disorder and the situation.

### At home

People with a communication disability will probably be least affected at home. Those around them may be able to anticipate certain needs, however, it may still be hard for a person to express his or her preferences and individuality. For instance, children with profound hearing impairments may not be able to explain their ideas, while adults with a head injury may not have the opportunity to make their own decisions.

### At school

Communication is a critical skill for learning, reading, writing and thinking. Children with communication disabilities may experience difficulties which lead to poor literacy skills and low academic achievement. Spelling problems are common, as are poor planning and problem solving abilities. The children may have to contend with teasing in the playground or not understand jokes. They may also be too embarrassed to join in a debate or answer questions, even though they have something to contribute or know the correct answer. The results can be anger, frustration, behaviour problems or withdrawal.



### **At work**

Problems experienced at school can continue at work. Poor academic achievement can lead to adult illiteracy and difficulty getting employment. Some people may not be able to follow their preferred career choice because of their communication disability. They may also experience a degree of teasing or prejudice. They may be ignored and not consulted for their ideas and opinions. They may not apply for promotion because they feel unable to participate in an interview, even though they may be the best person for the job.

### **At play**

Some people may choose not to join in conversations. They may experience difficulties making friends or participating in clubs and organisations.

### **How does it feel to have a communication disability?**

The emotional aspects can be as great a problem as the disability itself. Feelings of anger, grief, frustration and embarrassment are common among children and adults who have a communication disability. There is often a lack of confidence and low self esteem, resulting in those affected being reluctant to participate in what is happening around them.

The reaction of other people to those with a communication disability can also be a problem. People with a communication disability are often ignored or disregarded, their opinions are not asked for, and their needs are unmet. However, just because they cannot communicate as well as others does not mean they have nothing to say.

### **For further information:**

Contact Speech Pathology Australia - the official body representing speech pathologists, the professionals who work with and advocate for people who have a communication disability.

### **References**

Please contact Speech Pathology Australia's National Office for the references used to create this Fact Sheet.

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