

Supporting children after a stroke

Toolkit for teachers and childcare professionals Part 1

Introducing childhood stroke

Rebuilding lives after stroke

Stroke
Association

EvelinaLondon

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Introduction

This toolkit is for education and childcare professionals supporting children and young people affected by stroke. These materials cover children in pre-school, primary and secondary schools, college and further education settings.

Stroke is often seen as only affecting older adults, but it can happen to anyone of any age, including babies, children and young people. Several hundred children have a stroke each year in the UK.

Stroke affects everyone differently and each child who has a stroke will have different needs and challenges as a result of its impact. This toolkit aims to equip you so you are able to include and support children who've had a stroke in a childcare setting or classroom.

The toolkit contains information about stroke, as well as practical tools to help with communication, planning and documentation. Wherever possible, we've also signposted you to where you can find additional sources of information and support for professionals and families.

How we created this toolkit

This toolkit was developed with support from the team at Evelina London Children's Hospital, part of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust.

Parents and young people were instrumental in helping us to shape this resource, and provided their advice and shared stories.

We also collaborated with professionals working in health and educational settings with experience of stroke and acquired brain injury.

1. How stroke affects children and young people

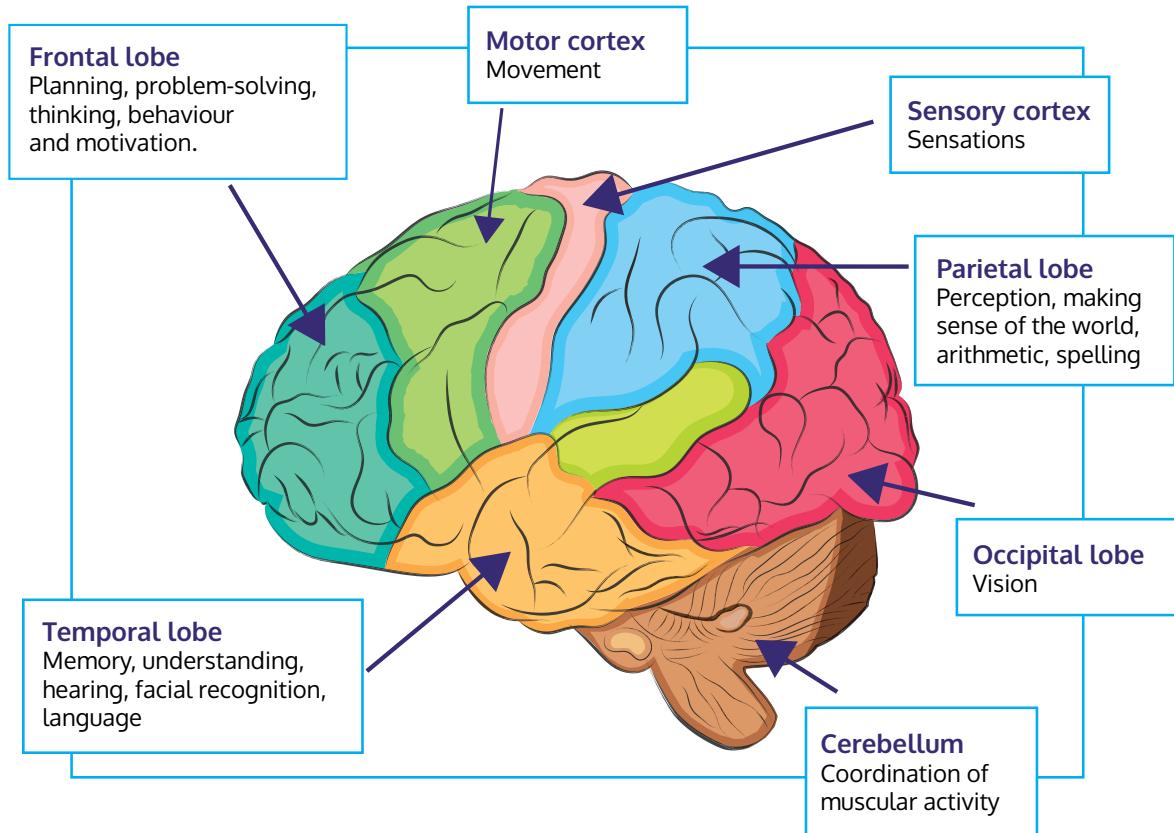
Any stroke, even if it is relatively minor, can still have a big impact on a child's learning and development.

A stroke can cause difficulties with movement and balance, as well as problems with speaking, understanding, reading and writing. Children who've had a stroke can have cognitive, learning or behavioural difficulties. They may also experience visual problems, pain and seizures. A child may not have a physical disability, but could still experience hidden effects such as fatigue, cognitive problems or emotional problems.

The effects of the stroke depend on:

- where the stroke happened in the brain, and the extent of the damage
- any other medical conditions a child has that can affect their recovery and energy levels
- the age and stage of the child – this can be linked to how aware they are of what happened, and how much they can use strategies to manage their difficulties.

The diagram shows the different parts of the brain, and gives an overview of the functions they perform.



It's important to acknowledge that this is a static image, with functions shown in clearly distinct areas. In reality, the brain is much more dynamic. Different areas are communicating all the time and the speed and efficiency of this communication and processing can be affected by stroke. In children and young people the brain is still developing, so these areas may have not been fully established. A stroke that happens during a key period of a child's brain development can have an impact on future learning skills as well as current ability.

In addition to the impact of the stroke itself, there are also secondary effects as a result of adjusting to a new medical condition, and coping with any changes in cognitive and physical ability.

Many children who experience a stroke adjust and cope well with any associated difficulties. But it's also common for children to experience changes in psychological and emotional wellbeing and behaviour. This may be as a result of the stroke itself, but can be partly due to the way things have changed for them, such as how they spend their social, play and friendship time.

The stroke might change the hobbies they can do, and their ability to do day-to-day things like getting dressed, preparing a snack or going out with friends.

The child's family could be affected, with family members taking on caring roles, and possible changes to working patterns and financial security. Parents and carers will also be concerned with the best way to help the young person understand what has happened. They may feel anxious about talking to family members, and giving the right information to the other people in the child's network, such as teachers and childcare professionals. Strokes can also have an effect on siblings who may see less of their brother or sister and parents, and have their own worries about what has happened.



2. Therapies and services supporting a young person

After a stroke, a child/young person is treated and supported by a team of professionals including doctors, nurses, therapists and education professionals. There are also a range of services that can support their family too. As you may encounter these professionals and services as part of your interaction with the child, we've included information about who should be considered the 'team around the child', in **part 3** of this toolkit to guide you.

The child or young person is likely to begin having assessments and therapy while they are in a hospital setting, and this may continue after they have returned to school. They will have some outside appointments as well as having therapies on school premises, which may mean they need to miss lesson time.

To assist with this, in **part 2** of this toolkit we've looked at ways of timetabling and working with the other professionals and parents/carers, to help you to make sure that the child can get support for their recovery when they are back at school.



When stroke strikes, part of your brain shuts down. And so does a part of you. Life changes instantly and recovery is tough. But the brain can adapt. Our specialist support, research and campaigning are only possible with the courage and determination of the stroke community. With more donations and support from you, we can rebuild even more lives.

Donate or find out more at **stroke.org.uk**

We're here for you. If you'd like to know more please get in touch.
Stroke Helpline: **0333 567 0841**
Website: **stroke.org.uk/gethelp**
Email: **info@stroke.org.uk**
From a textphone: **18001 0303 3033 100**

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