

Living Well After Brain Cancer Treatment Education Series

Managing Social Situations



Have relationships in your life become harder since your diagnosis and treatment? Do you struggle with feeling like you aren't sure what to say? Do you feel frustrated that others may misunderstand you? Individuals with brain cancer may struggle with managing their relationships and navigating social situations. Here are some suggestions to help:

- Please **be compassionate with yourself and others!** Your brain has been affected and is adjusting to these changes. And just as you are adjusting to these changes, other people in your life are too. Be patient with yourself and others. If you make a mistake, reflect on what went well and what you want to try differently the next time. What has worked for you in a similar situation in the past? What have you seen others do which might have worked?
- It is common to speak without thinking it through. Consider a **"Catch It – Check It – Change It"** strategy (three C's). The three **C's** can help you to **slow down and get your point across more clearly**. **Catch** yourself before you say something that may lead to problems and take a breath before responding. **Check** it – consider if it is a 'think it' versus 'say it' statement (see below). Is it helpful to the current conversation? If not, then **Change** it.
- After speaking, ask yourself if this had the intended impact. Try to **be aware and learn from your listener's reactions** (e.g., facial expressions, body language, verbal cues) to evaluate the effect. You can use the table below track what works and what doesn't.
- If you can identify when social slip-ups most often happen, you can track, problem-solve and **plan ahead** for certain situations. If you tend to be more apt to make mistakes when you are tired, consider resting prior to putting yourself in social situations. Take breaks when necessary.
- **Rehearse and role play** prior to going into a social situation. Practice saying your main points and introducing topics you will talk about. If you have someone you can role play with, even better!




Sometimes brain cancer and its treatment can have effects on a person's relationships and social cues. This can be difficult to tackle with a general strategy because it can vary so much from person to person and according to the situation. Your openness to accepting honest feedback from trusted people will be very helpful.



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Managing Social Situations continued...

- **Ask for what you need from others.** For example, ask clarifying questions and request that others repeat what they said. If you get lost in a conversation, just find a place to jump back in when you are ready.

Think It 	OR 	Say It 
Personal information about someone		Relevant information about yourself
Sarcasm, insults or negative comments about someone		Helpful, positive or respectful comments
Comments about physical appearance or race		Personal opinions that are respectfully presented
Facts that are off topic (unless you preface it with “I know this is off topic but...”)		Facts that are on topic. If you get lost in the conversation, then request to have speaker repeat or say more in order to get back on track
Questions that are overly personal or that may make the person feel uncomfortable		Questions that stem from respect and curiosity, but are not too personal

What was going on when the challenging moment occurred (situation, thoughts, feelings, behaviors)?	What were the consequences?	What is in my control that I can use early on to <u>Catch</u> it, <u>Check</u> it and <u>Change</u> it?	Was this strategy successful? What should I change?
<i>I was having a conversation, and the other person became upset when I shared my personal information</i>	<i>The other person became upset because I over-disclosed. It caused friction in my relationship</i>	<i>Try pre-planning. Before going to lunch think about some safe topics. Have some short responses ready for sensitive topics, or simply change the subject. Use the three C's. Is it a 'think it' or 'say it'?</i>	<i>Yes. Pleasant conversation. Next time I will also include questions to ask to keep the conversation flowing.</i>

Other ideas:

- **Consider help** from a family member, close friend or work colleague – someone you trust – to give you honest feedback and to help you see instances of “thinking versus saying”. You can ask clarifying questions if you don’t quite understand.
- Ask trusted others to **give you a signal or sign** when you are perhaps talking too much or straying off the topic. This will increase your real-time awareness of how you are interacting and communicating with others.
- There are **professionals** available to help. Talk with your neuro-oncologist about seeking a referral to someone who can help.