

Identity Theft: Rediscovering Ourselves After Stroke

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Chapter 3: A Teacher Without Words

1. How we each define personal identity can be complex and change over time. “Identity is multiple, dynamic, relationship-based, and interpretive. We are constantly evolving, and so are our identities, both informing our choices in life and being informed by them.” (p. 34) Consider your own identity:
 - a. What does “identity” mean to you?
 - b. As you think about your own identity, what are some of the underlying drivers that shape your identity?
 - c. How has your identity changed over time?
 - d. Share an example of an identity change that you chose, e.g. marriage, and one that was imposed upon you, e.g. death of a parent or loss of a job.
 - i. How did you feel after these different types of changes?
 - ii. How do these feelings compare to how you felt after your survivor’s stroke?

2. How we interface with the world matters. As Debra describes, “When there is no clash between how we think of ourselves and how we present ourselves in various situations, we are happier and more resilient. If there is a disparity, we become stressed or even distressed.” (p. 35)
 - a. How do you introduce yourself today when meeting a new group?
 - b. Has the way you introduce yourself changed since your survivor’s stroke?
 - i. Do you typically include your carepartner responsibilities?
 - ii. Why or why not?
 - c. Does how you introduce yourself vary from group to group?

- 3.** Debra describes identity as, “a network of meanings we hold in multiple contexts,” such as work, family, and community. (p. 39). She discusses the ways in which trauma disrupts our understanding of who we are, and shifts the question from “Who am I now?” to “Who do I want to be now?” This impact is true for both survivors and their carepartners.

 - a.** How has becoming a carepartner influenced your identity?
 - b.** Has being a carepartner overtaken other aspects of your identity?
 - c.** Have you ever felt there was a gap between who you are and who you want to be?

- 4.** Debra refers to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs as, “a tool for thinking about my problem. Maslow’s hierarchy gave me a way to understand my desires, frustrations, and challenges—both physical and emotional.” (p. 40)

 - a.** Since your survivor’s stroke, has their position as described on Maslow’s hierarchical pyramid changed?
 - i.** If so, how?
 - ii.** How has this impacted you?
 - b.** Since your survivor’s stroke, has your position as described on Maslow’s hierarchical pyramid changed?
 - i.** If so, how?
 - c.** If you and/or your survivor feel like your position on the hierarchy has downshifted, what kind of support would you need to be able to return to your prior position?
 - d.** How have your and your survivor’s transitions along Maslow’s hierarchy impacted your communications, relationship, and journey together?