



Beacon Hospital

COMMUNICATING WITH A PERSON WITH APHASIA

Here are some tips on (i) **getting your message across** and (ii) **helping the person with aphasia get their message across**

(i) To Help You Get Your Message Across:

Acknowledge that the person with aphasia is a competent, knowledgeable person who can make decisions. The person with aphasia knows what they want to say but cannot say it.

Look at the person when speaking. Your facial expression can help the person with aphasia understand you.

Supplement your speech with natural gestures and pointing.

Speak slowly and clearly, but speak with natural intonation and loudness. Make the most of facial expression and tone of voice, without overdoing it.

Speak in a tone of voice appropriate for communicating with an adult. Do not sound condescending. Do not sound like you are speaking to a child.

Write down key words. Use printed letters.

Use objects from the environment to help get your message across.

Use yes/no questions (i.e. "would you like tea?" instead of "what drink would you like?").

Have paper and pencil available. Write down key words from your message, or even sketch a picture, if it will help to get your point across.

Repeat and rephrase as needed.

Take your time.

Confirm that you are being understood. Ask simple questions to make sure.

Keep your messages focused, i.e., one message at a time. Simplify long, complex directions. Break into steps, if possible.

In a group, one speaker should talk at a time, and switch speakers slowly.

Change topics slowly, and with warning.

Ask for guidance or feedback from the individual. What helps the most? Does it help if I write some words? Will I help you find the word or will we give you time to speak?

(ii) To Help the *Person with Aphasia* Get *Their* Message Across:

Be an attentive, active listener

Be patient, and allow the individual to complete his or her own statements.

Do not routinely anticipate and fill in the end of statements. However, such assistance is appreciated in some instances. Be sensitive to the abilities and desires of the person.

Find out if they want your help, or would rather have more time to finish the statements themselves.

Focus on what the patient is able to communicate, regardless of the modality (spoken, gesture, written, facial expression, vocal intonation, body language).

Confirm your understanding by a natural response or a restatement (or expansion) of their utterance. Try to do this in a natural conversation style.

When you don't understand, encourage the use of pointing, gesture, writing, and drawing. Always have a pencil and paper available.

Give the individual enough time to respond. Before you speak again, watch closely for cues that the individual may be thinking or preparing a response.

Observe and discern the communication strengths and liabilities of the talker. Rely on the strengths, and try not to let the liabilities get in the way.

If the individual produces few words, but they tend to be meaningful, then mentally fill in the "little words" to get the big picture.

If the individual is talkative, but lacking in meaning, listen and watch for the bits of information that emerge from the words, facial expression, and gesture. Ignore the non-words.

Attempt to identify the general topic first and then move onto understanding the details. For example:

"Are you talking about your family?"

"Are you talking about your daughter?"

"Are you wondering if she is coming to visit today?"

Ask yes/no questions

Use a written yes/no for the person to point to if needed

If you do not have the time to communicate explain this and give a time when you will return to finish your conversation

If you would like to make an appointment with Speech and Language Therapy, please contact (01) 293 6692