



Beacon Hospital

TIPS WHEN SPEAKING TO A PERSON WITH DYSARTHRIA

- Make sure you know the general topic of the conversation.** Knowing the topic / context of the conversation makes a big difference in understanding speech that is distorted. Encourage speakers with dysarthria to introduce topics.
- Watch for turn-taking signals.** Some speakers with dysarthria for whom speech is slow have difficulty getting a turn in a conversation. Watch carefully for your partner's signals or decide in advance on some turn-taking signals.
- Give your undivided attention.** Speech is usually so easy to understand that listeners can do other things and still understand what is being said. Speech that is slow and distorted is more difficult to understand and therefore, requires our undivided attention.
- Picking the time and place for communication.** Most of us can talk all day without getting tired. Most of us can do many things while we talk. We can walk and talk, chew gum and talk, or eat and talk. Talking may be a very difficult task for a speaker with dysarthria. Avoid important conversations when the speaker is tired. Mealtimes may no longer be the best time for conversation.
- Watch the speaker.** All of us get a considerable amount of information by watching a speaker. When speech is slow or distorted, it is even more important to look at the speaker's face.
- Piecing together the cues.** Some people describe the task of understanding slow and distorted speech as a process of piecing together a series of cues. Some of the cues, of course, come from speech. Other cues may come from the gestures that the speaker may use or from the physical surroundings. Take advantage of whatever cues are available to you.
- Make the environment work for you.** Make sure you have enough light; that the light is on the speaker's face; and that all extraneous noise is eliminated or reduced.
- Avoid communication over long distances.** Make sure to always be in the same room when you initiate conversation. It is difficult for many speakers with dysarthria to speak loudly enough to be heard in another room.
- Make sure your hearing is as good as possible.** It is important that you hear well. If you suspect you have even a mild hearing loss, have your hearing tested. Properly fitted hearing aids may make the speech of individuals with dysarthria more understandable.
- Decide on and incorporate strategies for resolving communication breakdowns.** There may be times when you will not be able to understand some or all of a message. It is important

to develop a plan of action to take if this happens. Some people find the following steps helpful in preventing frustration:

- Signal as soon as you don't understand. (Most people find that a nonverbal signal is best because it does not disrupt the flow of conversation.)
- Let the speaker know the parts of the message that you did understand. (In this way, the speaker will not have to repeat the entire message.)
- Let the speaker repeat the misunderstood words one time.
- If you still don't understand, ask the dysarthric speaker to go to a predetermined "back up" plan that involves perhaps rephrasing, verbal spelling, or writing.

Establish some rules of the game. Speakers with dysarthria may have some very definite preferences about what they would like you to do and what they wish you would not do. Knowing these preferences may reduce frustration. For example, does the speaker with dysarthria want you to guess or not? want you to finish sentences or not?

Facilitating communication with others. Communicating with people who are unfamiliar to them is difficult for many dysarthric speakers. You may be of assistance as a translator in some situations. Again, it is useful to have some predetermined guidelines. Does the dysarthric want assist them when talking to unfamiliar people or do they not? Do they want assistance in certain situations i.e. ordering food in a cafe?