

COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL CONVERSATIONS FOR FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS OF PEOPLE WITH **APHASIA**

In everyday life, conversations are rarely strictly verbal. We use body

language, facial expressions, eye contact, gestures,  pointing, and many other non verbal cues to communicate with one another.

One important goal about having any conversation, and this holds true for conversing with a person with aphasia, is getting your message “IN”

and allowing the other person get their message “OUT”. 

The following tips and techniques are meant to assist you in achieving success in your conversations with aphasic adults through the use of verbal and non-verbal tools.

BE PREPARED:

1. Choose a suitable environment for your conversation. Minimize or eliminate background noise (TV, radio, other people talking)



2. Be sure to have your conversation partner’s attention before you

begin, and make eye contact



3. Allow for plenty of time, so that neither of you feel rushed.



4. Have a “toolkit” available that contains facilitators for communication as well as props or aids:

- A pencil with eraser for the person with aphasia 

- Several pieces of blank paper 

- A black marker for yourself 

- Items appropriate to the desired conversation such as maps ,

newspapers , photographs , calendars , pictures, menus, appointment books etc. may assist the person with aphasia to understand you clearly.

BE FLEXIBLE:

1. Use gestures and demonstration freely to get your message across



2. Encourage all forms of communication: writing, drawing, gestures, eye contact, facial expressions.

COMMUNICATING VERBALLY, (SPEAKING ALOUD):

- Talk naturally
- Articulate (speak clearly)
- Use familiar words in direct, straightforward language
- Use short, clear sentences
- Speak at a normal speed
- Treat adults with respect, (refrain from “talking down” to your conversation partner)
- Address one thought at a time
- Emphasize key words
- Pause between main ideas

- Verify frequently to check if you, (and they) understand (reflect, expand, summarize)
- Repeat and rephrase if necessary
- Consider using a combination of verbal and non-verbal communication methods (see below for non verbal hints)
 - Structure questions so they require yes/no or single word answers (see below for optional symbols representing “YES/NO” answers)
 - When there is a gap in comprehension or verbalization for the person with aphasia, facilitate rather than correct:
- Use hints or cues such as sounding out the first syllable of the word you think they are trying to say. This kind of cue may help them get the word out. “PUH” may help them get out the word “purse”

COMMUNICATING NON-VERBALLY

1. Try writing down what they are trying to say, as reading may (or may not) help them say the word.
 - when writing, use words or pictures/symbols that the person with aphasia can point to:



- put pictures near text where appropriate
 - be sure writing is legible
 - family member/caregiver should use black marker so message is bold and clear
2. When writing, use a **KEYWORD(S)**/**TOPIC** placed on the paper as a “heading” to achieve focus for the conversation
 3. Use numbers (1,2,3) instead of words (one, two, three)
 4. Consider “**will you show me?**” (draw it, gestures, picture books)
 5. Person with aphasia should use a pencil and piece of paper
 6. Consider **drawing** as another form of language
 7. Offer use of props such as a current newspaper, calendar, photo album etc. to help them get their message out in a different way
 8. Encourage and use facial expressions, tone of voice, demonstration or gestures in a non distracting way to get the message across

9. Use iconic (recognizable) gestures such as bringing hand to mouth to indicate “eat”
10. Consider use of “high tech” vs “low tech” tools (iPAD or TABLET, APPS designed for communication)
11. MOST IMPORTANTLY, focus on the “**INTERACTION**” rather than “TRANSACTION” as it brings a positive social and emotional connection between the caregiver/family member and the person with aphasia.

Communication rather than perfection is the key.



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