

NEUROTALK

CLIENT INFORMATION SERIES

Being an Effective Communication Partner

Practical ways to support clear, connected conversations with someone who has a communication difficulty.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Communication is a two-way process. The way you listen, respond and adapt can make a real difference to how a conversation goes.

Communication difficulties can affect speaking, understanding, finding words, using your voice or keeping track of a conversation. Small changes to your approach and the environment can make communication easier, reduce frustration and support the person's independence.

STRATEGIES TO TRY

1 Reduce background noise

Turn down the TV or radio, reduce competing noise or move somewhere quieter for important conversations.

2 Face them and keep eye contact

Position yourself so the person can see your face and any gestures you use. Good lighting can help. Follow the person's preferences around eye contact.

3 Give them time

Allow time to understand what has been said and prepare a response. Resist the urge to finish their sentences or jump in too quickly.

4 Ask, don't guess

If you haven't understood, let the person know. Ask a specific question or offer a small number of choices if helpful. For example, "Was it a person or a place?" Avoid repeated guessing.

5 Check your understanding

Summarise what you think the person has said and give them a chance to confirm or correct you. If you're unsure, work together to clarify the message.

6 Cut down distractions

Focus on the conversation rather than multitasking. In group settings, encourage one person to speak at a time.

7 Adjust your own rate

Speak naturally, with a little extra time between ideas. Use clear, concise sentences and pause to allow the person to process information and respond.

8 Stay patient and positive

Focus on the person's message rather than perfect wording or pronunciation. Acknowledge their contribution, avoid talking down to them and include them in conversations and decisions.

QUICK TIPS BY DIFFICULTY TYPE

Dysarthria	Listen carefully and reduce background noise. If you haven't understood, ask the person to repeat or try another way of conveying the message, such as writing or gestures. Ask what works best for them.
Aphasia / Word-Finding	Allow time for the word to come. If the person would like help, offer a cue or a small number of choices. Gestures, pictures, writing and pointing may also help.
Voice Difficulties	Reduce background noise and position yourself at a comfortable listening distance. Avoid repeatedly asking the person to speak louder. If their voice is difficult to hear, explore other ways to support communication.
Cognitive - Communication	Share information in manageable amounts, allow processing time and focus on one topic at a time. Write down important details or agreed next steps when helpful.

WHAT TO AVOID

- Talking about the person rather than to them when they are present.
- Pretending to understand when you haven't.
- Correcting every error instead of focusing on the message.
- Raising your voice unless the person has asked you to or hearing needs make it appropriate.
- Rushing, interrupting or finishing sentences without permission.
- Assuming the person cannot understand, make decisions or contribute because their communication is different.

Ask the person what helps them communicate best. Everyone is different, and the most useful strategies are the ones that respect their preferences and support meaningful conversations. A speech pathologist can help you identify and practise strategies that suit the person's communication needs.

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