

## Patient information

# Communicating with people with aphasia

## Information for family, friends and carers

### What is aphasia?

Aphasia (sometimes called dysphasia) affects a person's ability to communicate with others. It is caused by damage to the brain, often a stroke.

Aphasia can make it difficult for someone to speak, understand what people are saying, read or write. It does not damage intelligence. Aphasia can be very frustrating for the person and their family and friends.

### Some difficulties may include:

- Being unable to produce any or very little speech
- The use of incorrect words or sounds
- Repeating an inappropriate phrase, word or sound
- Producing sentences that do not make sense
- Producing sentences with words missing
- Difficulty following instructions or conversation
- Unreliable yes and no responses
- Difficulty reading and writing

### How can you help your friend or relative with aphasia?

*Seek advice from the Speech and Language Therapist about your friend / relative's communication. They will be able to provide you with strategies for the individual.*

## **General strategies for communicating with your friend or relative:**

- Reduce background noise and distractions
- Position yourself face to face when having a conversation
- Gain their attention before speaking
- Choose one topic or activity at a time
- Be patient and allow plenty of time
- Remember; speak to the person like an adult. Aphasia does not affect intelligence

### **Do:**

- Speak slowly and clearly
- Use short, simple phrases and sentences
- Use visual cues to support your message, e.g. show them what you are about to do
- Allow them time for them to respond
- Be prepared to repeat what you said
- Ask clarifying questions if you are uncertain of what the person has said, e.g. "Are you talking about your dog?"
- Give your full attention; you may be able to guess the subject matter from the odd word
- Try to use yes / no or closed questions, e.g. "Do you want your glasses?"
- Let the person attempt conversation whenever they want to
- Let the person know when you do not understand, e.g. "I'm sorry, I don't understand, let's try again."
- When you are speaking, try writing down key words as you go along
- Acknowledge their use of non-verbal communication, e.g. facial expression, gesture, body language
- Give the person visual choices that he/she can point to, e.g. "Would you like the book or your glasses?" (showing both)
- Encourage other ways of communicating:

- Can they describe it?
- What is the first letter or sound, e.g. “ch” for “chair”?
- Can they write it?
- Can they show you with a gesture or point to it?
- Can they draw it?

## Do not:

- Assume the person cannot understand you.
- Overload them with information, e.g. Instead of saying “We're going to have some lunch in the cafe after going for a walk”, say “We’re going for a walk (pause). Then we’ll have lunch”.
- Talk over a person as if they are not there.
- Avoid conversing with the person
- Force the person to speak when they do not want to or are unable
- Criticise attempts to communicate
- Talk for the person unless absolutely necessary or without their permission
- Interrupt the person when trying to say something



If you would like to speak to a member of the **Speech and Language Therapy team**, please just call to discuss on **(01284) 713303** and we will aim to find a mutually convenient time.

*If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (the new name for DisabledGo)*

<https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust>



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