

AN IMPORTANT CONVERSATION TO HAVE

When is it ok to fill in words and help your loved one with Aphasia

How do I know when to help them out? How long do I let them struggle before jumping in? When the words come out wrong, is it ok to correct them? These are all common and expected questions that may come to mind when you have a loved one with Aphasia. Communication can be challenging, and it can be difficult to know if and when a loved one would like you to help them out, or if they'd rather you give them time to get the words out on their own. So why not have a discussion about it?

Talk to your friend or partner about their preferences when it comes to helping them out. Maybe discuss a signal that you both agree upon when it's ok for the other to jump in and help out if he/she knows what the other is trying to communicate. Sometimes an individual with Aphasia needs extra time to communicate, so this will allow for them to have that time, while also being able to signal to their communication partner when he/she may need some help.

Not all errors need to be fixed

It is important to allow for some errors to happen, and not always be corrected. Consider whether or not the message was communicated successfully. If the individual was able to get his/her message across, despite there being some inaccuracies in the transfer of the message, then let it be. Encourage successful communication, not perfect communication.

Another approach is to consider modeling the correct behavior, rather than directly stating the person is wrong and trying to fix it. For example, if the individual with Aphasia says "We have 2 dogs," you can reinforce the correct message by modeling it and saying "We have 3 dogs," and even provide a hand gesture to indicate the number, paired with your verbal response. This will likely be better received than saying "That wasn't right, you said we have 2 dogs...you know we have 3. Say 3 dogs!"



Additional examples:

“She came to visit yesterday.” → “Yes, HE came to visit yesterday.”

“That game...exciting...wow!” → “Yes, that game sure was exciting!”

“Can I have more materwelon?” → “You want more watermelon? Sure!”

What if the message was NOT understood?

There are likely going to be times when perhaps the message communicated by the individual with Aphasia is not understood by the recipient. The most important thing in this case is to NOT PRETEND that you understand. It's important to let the individual with Aphasia know that you do not understand what they've communicated, and then provide suggestions for things they can do to help you understand. Are you able to write or draw what you're trying to tell me? Can you show me?

It's also really important to ensure that you are both still on the same topic. Are we still talking about the show last night or are you talking about something else? As the listener, you can also provide written word choices and visual support to help support the person with Aphasia, and encourage them to try alternative forms of communication to assist them in communicating their message.

My loved one with Aphasia does not always know their message doesn't make sense

Awareness can be impacted when you have Aphasia, and it is possible that the individual with Aphasia may not always know when the wrong word or words are coming out, or when their sentence didn't make sense, etc. Their auditory feedback system may have been affected by their stroke or brain injury, making it difficult for them to catch all their errors or mistakes when they are communicating.

As a listener, it can be helpful to let the individual with Aphasia know “Here is what you said. Is that what you meant to say? Or were you trying to tell me something different?”, while providing written/visual support as well. This way, they can SEE what they said, as



well as HEAR what they said again when you are verifying their response, allowing them to check their response and potentially provide a correction, all while also improving their insight and awareness into their communicative challenges.

Everyone is different

Just like everyone with Aphasia presents with different challenges, everyone with Aphasia may have different preferences for if and when they'd like someone to help them with their communication. Communication breakdowns with Aphasia are inevitable, and this can be challenging for both the listener and the communicator. It can be quite valuable to establish a system in advance, and discuss some of the above to avoid extra frustrations and allow for additional support.

