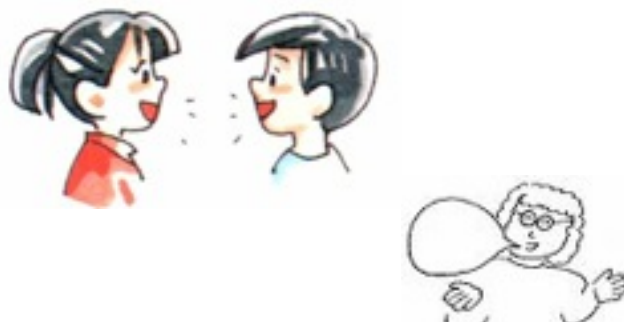


How Do You Communicate with Your Partner?

Now that you understand the importance of your role as a conversation partner, here are some techniques you can use when communicating with a person with aphasia. You do not want to rely too heavily on these techniques, as they may interfere with the naturalness of the conversation. Remember that your conversation partner has aphasia, so communication breakdowns are inevitable no matter how skilled a communication partner you may be. Openly acknowledge that communication breakdowns will occur at the onset of the conversation. Whenever possible, you should attribute communication breakdowns to your own limitations as a conversation partner, as opposed to their communication weaknesses.

Try to begin each conversation naturally, using as few techniques as possible. During your initial conversation, pay attention to your partner's communication strengths and weaknesses. Try to select techniques to support the conversation based on their unique communication profile. In many cases, finding the most appropriate supportive techniques will be a process of trial and error. Remember that spontaneous conversation is the goal, so do not feel as if you have to use all of the techniques provided. Successful conversation is contingent on selection of appropriate topics to discuss. Remember, your conversation partner is an intelligent, competent individual who is capable of discussing complex topics provided the right support.



Kagan, A. (1993). Functional is not enough: Training conversation partners for aphasic adults. In Gailey, G.F. (Ed.), *Aphasia treatment: World perspectives* (199-225). San Diego, CA : Singular Publishing Group.

The Aphasia Institute, Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia. Retrieved November 2, 2008, Web site: <http://www.aphasia.ca/training/sca.html>

Techniques to Facilitate Expression

If your partner demonstrates weakness in verbal expression, consider using the following techniques to support the conversation and repair communication breakdowns:

- Give your partner plenty of time to say what he or she wants to say. Try to avoid finishing his or her sentences.
- If you cannot understand what your partner is trying to tell you, ask him or her to give you clues by gesturing, writing down key words, etc. Hold on to these written key words and topics to use as references during future conversations.
- Use different supports throughout the conversation, including gesturing, drawing, and writing. Try to incorporate these techniques into the conversation as naturally as possible.
 - It will be helpful to have a variety of resources available when engaging in multimodal conversation – refer to the provided Resource Kit.
- Offer your partner opportunities to correct or confirm the message.
- Only ask your partner one question at a time, and then be sure to give him or her time to answer.
- Summarize what the person is trying to say to ensure that you are both following the same topic progression – speak slowly and clearly. If necessary, add gestures, drawings, or writing.
- Encourage your partner to use conversational supports, including pictures and writing materials. Be sure to provide a model for each support before expecting your partner to try using it during conversation.

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Techniques to Facilitate Comprehension:

If your partner demonstrates weakness in auditory comprehension, consider using the following techniques to support the conversation and repair communication breakdowns:

- Use short, simple sentences – this does not mean you need to talk about simple topics – rather you need to simplify the language and sentence structure you use.
- Pay attention to your intonation and prosody – use an expressive voice and emphasize, or stress, meaningful words.
- If written cues benefit your partner, write down main ideas or key words. If your partner has difficulty reading, draw main ideas.
- Use commonly recognized gestures while you are talking. It is appropriate to slightly exaggerate these gestures.
- Pay attention to your partner's nonverbal language, including facial expression, body posture, eye gaze, etc.
 - Aphasic adults tend to engage conversation partners through nonverbal language, such as smiling and eye contact – if you are aware of these cues, this highly developed nonverbal language will supplement your conversation.
 - By paying attention to your partner's nonverbal language, you will also recognize when he or she is having receptive difficulties so you can modify your delivery (i.e. slowing down your rate, using more gestures, repeating your message, etc.)

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Even More Techniques to Facilitate Comprehension:

- Control the communication environment – for example, reduce background noise and reduce visual distractions.
- Use closed-ended or yes/no questions to pursue a topic.
 - Structure these questions so they progress from general to more specific.
- Cue your partner before you transition to a new topic. You can alert them by providing verbal cues, written cues, pictures, or gestures.
- Give your partner sufficient time to process the auditory information you are presenting. This will mean that you will need to become comfortable with pauses and periods of silence during your conversations.

