



Fall 2019
UMass Amherst
Aphasia Connections
Program

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Purpose of Aphasia Connections



- To provide a social outlet for adults with Aphasia by connecting them with undergraduate and graduate students in the department of Communication Disorders at UMass Amherst.
- *This is a social opportunity, NOT speech therapy!*

What is Aphasia?



- Acquired language impairment that affects the ability to:
 - Express oneself
 - Understand what others say
 - Read & write
- Results from damage to the brain, most often due to left hemisphere stroke
- **Not** an impairment of intelligence, but rather the loss of the ability to communicate effectively

Psychosocial Effects of Aphasia



- Your pals (and their families) may be experiencing:
 - Life-changing event
 - Loss of employment
 - Decreased social involvement
 - Social stigma
 - Isolation
 - Depression

Aphasic Behaviors



- Our pals may have difficulty with...
 - Word finding
 - Fluency of sentence production
 - Auditory comprehension
 - Repetition
 - Reading
 - Writing

Apraxia of Speech (AOS)

- Can co-occur with Aphasia (your pal may have both)
- AOS *is...*
 - A motor planning speech disorder in which a person has trouble saying what they want to say *correctly* and *consistently*.
 - AOS is not due to weakness.
- *Symptoms of AOS:*
 - Difficulty putting sounds and syllables in the correct order
 - Groping
 - Saying the word incorrectly several times
 - Incorrect use of prosody
 - Slow rate of speech

Importance of Conversations



- Part of everyday life
- How we resolve conflicts, make plans, argue, confide in one another, interact with others, create bonds and relationships
- Inability to have a conversation affects one's access to social interactions
 - decrease in relationships
 - self confidence
 - ability to express oneself

Supported Conversation



- Designed to reduce the psychosocial consequences of Aphasia
- Based on the idea of conversational partnerships
- Partner acts as a resource for the person with Aphasia and actively shares the communication load
- Goal is to promote *natural* and *spontaneous* communication!

Strategies to facilitate conversation:



- Acknowledge Competence: Speak with normal tone of voice, normal pitch, etc.
- Use resources/environment (Books, newspapers, videos)
- Closed ended questions
 - When the person is asked a question and chooses an answer rather than generating one
 - Pictures
 - Signs (e.g. thumbs up/down)
- Multi-modal input:
 - Drawing, writing, gestures, pantomime
- Give adequate processing time
- Expansion and reflection of messages
 - Correct or confirm the message that was spoken
- Respond to comprehension problems and make adjustments

Counseling: Stages of Grief

- **Denial**
 - Patient may have difficulty accepting their situation; Patient/family need answers
- **Anger**
 - Can be perceived as blaming healthcare professionals
- **Bargaining**
 - May try to negotiate more meetings with a pal
- **Depression**
 - Motivate; encourage groups; watch for isolation
- **Acceptance**
 - Of stroke//self; groundwork for problem-solving skills & wellness perspective

Counseling your pal



- Reframing
 - Changing a negative to a positive
 - Highlight what your pal CAN do
- Encourage participation in support groups
- Verbal and nonverbal encouragers
 - Let them know that you are actively listening
 - It is OK to ask questions if you don't understand
- Validate and normalize your pal's emotions
- Externalize his/her aphasia
 - This is not you, this is the effect that the aphasia is having on you
- Understand family life stage
 - Change in roles and responsibilities
- Silence
 - Sometimes simply being present is enough

Things to do with your pal:



- 20 Questions
- Use videos/YouTube
- Share pictures of family and friends
- Listen to music
- Play board games or card games
- Read books, newspapers, magazines
- Take a walk
- Scrapbook
- Cook/Bake
- Write letters, e-mails, cards

See also:

<http://blogs.umass.edu/aphasia/tips-for-student-pals-in-aphasia-connections-program/>

What we expect from you:



- A weekly visit to an assigned pal - a minimum of 10 visits total
- Attendance at the mandatory midterm meeting ()
- Completed visit log returned at midterm meeting
 - (should visit your pal 4-5 times before midterm meeting)
- A midterm paragraph (due one week before the midterm meeting - please **email** your paper to aphasiaconnections@gmail.com by **12:00 am**)
- Completed visit log returned at midterm meeting
 - (should visit your pal 4-5 times before final meeting)
- Attendance at the mandatory end-of-semester meeting ()
- 3 page reflection paper on your experience (due before final meeting - please **email** your paper to aphasiaconnections@gmail.com by)

Recommended: Attending one UMass Amherst Stroke Support Group meeting
(if interested, coordinate with Dr. K)

Messages from Former Pals

- *“Being a pal is fun and rewarding!”*
- *“I would say not to be nervous when you meet your pal and do things that they like to do”*
- *“Enjoy the experience you gain working with your pals.”*
- *“Be prepared to relax and have a two-way conversation, even if it takes a little time.”*
- *“Be patient and open to something different!”*
- *“Be friends with your pal - not a mentor or therapist.”*
- *“I would say it was a great and fun experience! And not to be nervous the first time you meet with your pal because I’m sure you will connect quickly.”*



**Questions? Comments?
Concerns?**