Educating the Community

Information for Emergency Responders

Communicating with someone with aphasia

Ensure that you are communicating effectively by following these steps.

1. Have the person's attention *before* you speak.
2. Attempt to minimize or eliminate background noise.
3. Keep your own voice at a normal level. Do not shout if the person does not understand you.
4. Keep communication simple, but adult. Do not talk down to the person.
5. Confirm that you are communicating successfully with "yes" and "no" questions.
6. Repeat statements or directions when necessary.
7. Give the person time to speak. Resist the urge to finish sentences or offer words.
8. Other modes of communication might be useful. Try drawing, writing, gestures, or facial expressions.
9. Always make eye contact.
10. Check frequently during the conversation to see if the person understands.

Useful tools to aid communication

People with aphasia often have one or more of these tools that indicate their aphasia or help them communicate.

1. Aphasia ID card
2. "I have aphasia" window decal
3. MedIDRecord app on their phone or tablet
4. MedID bracelet or necklace that identifies them and their health information
5. Communication board
6. Emergency contact person that can talk to you

Signs of aphasia

A person with aphasia may

- Have trouble finding their words
- Use incorrect or less appropriate words during conversation
- Have trouble understanding what you're saying. Remember, you can write, draw, or gesture.
- Become frustrated. Be patient and remember their frustration is not directed at you.

Additional Resources

- Communication tips (English and Spanish): https://www.aphasia.org/aphasia-resources/communication-tips/
- About aphasia: https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000024.htm
- Video description of aphasia: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=40&v=zjkgSCIXo3k

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