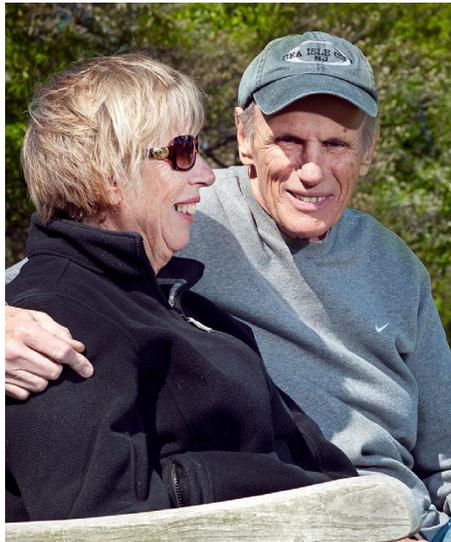


Communication & Aphasia

20 communication tips for caregivers of people with aphasia By Amy Reintein, MS, CCC-SLP

Becoming a caregiver to a loved one diagnosed with aphasia can be confusing and overwhelming. Aphasia can affect a person's speaking, listening, reading and/or writing depending on the location and type of aphasia and the severity of the brain injury. This new difficulty with communicating can be frustrating for both parties, so it's important to remember to not give up — it takes time, and different approaches work for different people. Talk to your speech-language pathologist about specific strategies, but here are 20 tips to help you communicate better with your loved one with aphasia. Most importantly, just remember to love them!



- 1.** Create a daily schedule of routine activities using visuals such as a task reminder or calendar. Engage them in participating in their normal activities. A structured day will improve your loved one's orientation and memory, allowing for greater responsibility in rehabilitation.
- 2.** Use gestures or visual cues whenever possible. Photos, simple signs, Augmentative and Alternative Communication devices (AAC) or any kind of visual can assist with communicating wants and needs.
- 3.** Talk about things that they enjoy such as family, friends and hobbies. Go through photo albums and name everyone and everything in the pictures.
- 4.** Participate in group activities to promote socialization and language stimulation.
- 5.** Don't discuss personal matters if they seem fatigued, confused, or become upset. Postpone it for another time.
- 6.** Have their attention before beginning any communication. Touch them on the shoulder and wait until they are looking at you and then begin.
- 7.** Your communication environment should be quiet and relaxed for effective communication. Turn off electronics, sit far from noisy appliances and be prepared for communicating in public (i.e. bring an AAC device).
- 8.** Treat your loved one as an adult. Despite any comprehension difficulties, they are aware that they are adults, and treating them any other way is demoralizing. Involve them in decision-making, and engage them in discussions.
- 9.** Speak at a normal slow rate using natural pauses and tone of voice. Don't shout; they are not hard of hearing, they are aphasic!
- 10.** Keep instructions or questions short, simple, direct and answerable with a "yes" or "no." Make sure your loved one understands what you've communicated.
- 11.** If you are unable to understand what they are trying to convey, ask simple questions and use simple gestures until they indicate that you have found the subject area.
- 12.** If all techniques fail, and you do not know what they are trying to say, acknowledge so by saying "I'm sorry, I don't understand. Maybe we can try again later."
- 13.** Give your loved one time to respond. Try not to interrupt once they've begun speaking. It takes a lot of effort for them to produce speech.
- 14.** Often someone with aphasia is able to say a word one moment, but not the next. It's best not to say "You said it yesterday, you can say it again." Instead, try providing them with the beginning sound of the word, describing similar words, and/or the word's meaning.
- 15.** When they make a mistake, try not to show your frustration. Try to stay calm and keep your sense of humor!
- 16.** Don't correct errors. Praise all attempts to speak and downplay any errors. Avoid insisting that that each word be produced perfectly.
- 17.** Don't talk for your loved one in group situations. Don't talk as if they were not in the room.
- 18.** Be realistic. Telling them that "Your speech will come back" will not make them feel better. Instead, be honest and empathetic by saying, "I'm sorry this is happening to you. Just try your best."
- 19.** For fun and stimulation of language, sing! SINGING or humming favorite songs, even simple ones, has been shown to stimulate the damaged left side of the brain after a stroke because music is mostly stored in the preserved right side of the brain. So SING, SING, SING!
- 20.** Encourage independence.

Amy Reintein, MS, CCC-SLP, is a practicing speech-language pathologist in New York. She works in acute care in addition to seeing pediatric and adult private clients. She mainly specializes in dysphagia and neurogenic speech disorders.

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