

Apraxia –

Communication advice for families

Guiding Principles:

Communication is supposed to be **enjoyable** and **two-way**, rather than a school-like **test** and perform model.

We **don't want** your loved one to **struggle** and **get frustrated** by these ideas. As you are aware, it is much more important that they are a part of the family and are **included** as much as possible. Often **non-language based activities** may be more enjoyable e.g. music, jigsaws, art, painting or cooking.

There is evidence that doing '**easy**' things is **also beneficial** (also known as "errorless learning"), so don't feel things need to 'stretch' your family member.

After a **stroke**, communication can be affected by **Apraxia of Speech** (also known as Dyspraxia).

What Is Apraxia?

Apraxia describes a difficulty **planning, sequencing** and **coordinating movements** required for **speech**. It is **not** caused by a weakness of the speech muscles. **Automatic movements** for eating, yawning,

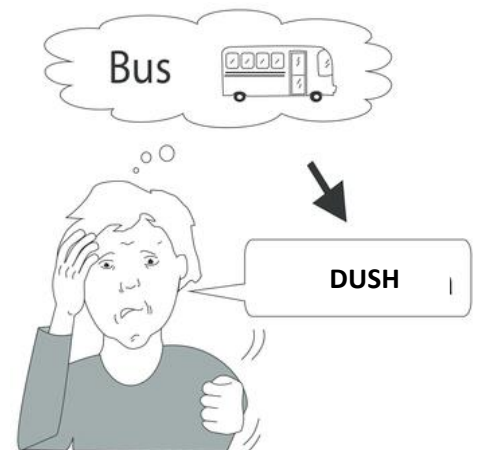
coughing, etc. are **okay**, but **deliberate control** for speech movements is **affected**.

Some words may be easy, especially **social phrases** such as ‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘hello’, ‘thank you’ or swear words. **Deliberate speech is more difficult**. Often the **harder** someone **tries** to **talk**, the **worse** it becomes, and increased **frustration** makes it more difficult.

What Is It Like?

Your family member knows what she wants to say. They have difficulty coordinating the muscle movements necessary to say those words and as a result may say something completely different.

For example, **they** may try to say “bus” but it may come out as “dush”. **They** recognise the error and tries again, sometimes getting it right, but sometimes saying something else again. This can become quite frustrating. Simple familiar topics will be easier to talk about than complex ones – the effort to plan a complicated response will interrupt speech processing.



Symptoms Include:

- **Struggling** for the **correct movements** to produce speech sounds
- **Speech** is **slow** and **deliberate** because of **difficulty sequencing** the required mouth movements
- Saying words with the **sounds** in the **wrong order**
- Difficulty with **long words** with many syllables

How Can You Help?

- Allow the person **time** to speak.
- **Encourage them** to remain **calm** and try to **relax**. This will take the pressure off talking and allow **them** to sequence the sounds better
- **Encourage other** type of **communication**, such as pointing, gesturing, facial expressions. This will be particularly important if **they** are tired or not feeling well.
- If they doesn't say a word **clearly**, **do not** ask for a **repetition**. Second attempts can often be unsuccessful.
- Sometimes **the harder they try** to make the speech movements **the more difficult it becomes**. On these occasions, have a **break** and **return to the topic later**.

- Remember that **speech and concentration** can be **tiring**. Communication will **be less successful when tired**, upset or unwell.

Encourage your family member to use some communication **strategies**. They help increase their intelligibility:

1. **Breaking long sentences into smaller chunks** and pausing for breath at the end of a phrase (you can practice it by taking turns to read newspaper headlines etc). For example if the headline reads 'The prime minister announced that he would abolish taxation' this could be broken down into 2 parts with a pause and breath half way e.g. 'The prime minister announced / that he would abolish taxation'.
2. **Breaking long words down** (segmentation). For example, if they are trying to read '*publication*' encourage them to separate the syllables, ie. pub-li-ca-tion.
3. Encourage **them** to **focus on the first sound** of that word – once **they** got that the rest of the word is more likely to follow.

Alternatives To Conversation

- Try **turn-taking games** that **do not rely** on **language** skills, *e.g. Connect 4, Ludo, Draughts, Dominoes, simple card games, noughts and crosses.*
- Find **jigsaws** with an adult theme **but few pieces** to complete together.
- Offer to **read** to them – a newspaper, a letter from a friend, a chapter in a book.
- **Listen** to the **radio, music, audio books**, or **watch television** and **encourage** comments and opinions.
- **Look** at **pictures** in books, magazines, photo albums, holiday brochures instead of reading.
- Find **art activities** such as painting-by-numbers or sketch books.
- **Go outside** or to the **cafe** and **discuss** the people, places and things that you see.
- Do not be afraid of **simply spending time together** (watching TV, holding hands or watching the world go by).

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