

## Strategies for Communication Partners

Communication is a partnership. The following techniques may make the communication process easier. The items that are checked may be the most appropriate for you.

- ❑ **Make sure you know the general topic of the conversation.** Knowing the topic of conversation makes a big difference in understanding language that is distorted. Encourage introduction of topics. He is more motivated by functional language.
- ❑ **Watch for turn – taking signals.** Some speakers with aphasia for whom language is slow have difficulty getting a turn in a conversation. Watch carefully for signals or decide in advance on some turn-taking signals.
- ❑ **Give your undivided attention.** Speech is usually so easy to understand that listeners can do other things and still understand what is being said. Speech that is slow and disconnected is more difficult to understand and therefore, requires our undivided attention.
- ❑ **Watch the speaker.** All of us get a considerable amount of information by watching a speaker. When language is slow or disconnected, it is even more important to look at the speaker's face.
- ❑ **Piecing together the cues.** Some people describe the task of understanding slow and disconnected language as a process of piecing together a series of cues. Some of the cues come from speech, other cues may come gestures that the speaker may use or from the physical surroundings. Take advantage of whatever cues are available to you.
- ❑ **Make the environment work for you.** Maximize your ability to understand John by making sure you have a good view of his face; and that all extraneous noise is eliminated or reduced.
- ❑ **Decide on and incorporate strategies for resolving communication breakdowns.** There may be times when you will not be able to understand some or all of a message. It is important to develop a plan of action to take if this happens. Some people find the following steps helpful in preventing frustration:
  1. Signal as soon as you don't understand. (Most people find that a nonverbal signal is best because it does not disrupt the flow of conversation).
  2. Let him know the parts of the message that you did understand. (In this way, he will not have to repeat the entire message.)
  3. Let him repeat the misunderstood words one at a time.
  4. If you still don't understand, ask John to go to a predetermined "back up" plan that involves perhaps rephrasing, verbal spelling, or writing.
- ❑ **Establish some rules of the game.** Speakers with aphasia may have some very definite preferences about what they would like you to do and what they wish you would not do. Knowing these preferences may reduce frustration. For example does he want you to guess or not? Want you to finish his sentences or not?
- ❑ **Facilitating communication with others.** Communicating with people who are unfamiliar to them is difficult for many aphasic speakers. You may be of assistance as a translator in some situations. Again, it is useful to have some predetermined guidelines. Does the John want you to translate misunderstood parts of the message? To provide long or elaborate responses to questions when you know what the answers are?