Speaking to a person with Aphasia

- Speak slowly but normally. Pause frequently.
- Keep the message simple. Present one idea at a time. Verify that he/she understands before moving on.
- Repeat or rephrase your message, if necessary.
- Write down key words. Use gestures & facial expressions.
- Recognize that communication takes extra effort & is more difficult when the person with aphasia is tired.
- Remember that you are speaking to an intelligent adult. Don’t patronize.
- Include the person with aphasia in important decisions. Ask permission before speaking for him/her.

Listening to someone with Aphasia

- Be patient. Allow extra speaking time.
- Confirm the message:
  - Repeat what you think he/she meant to say.
  - Ask yes/no questions to clarify.
  - If you get the idea, don’t worry about small mistakes.
  - If you still don’t understand, drop it until later.
- Encourage the person with aphasia to write keywords, draw pictures, point or use gestures. Try saying: “Can you show me?”.

Improving the conversational setting

- Get attention first. Reduce background noise.
- Have paper & pencil handy to write or draw messages.
- Communicate one-to-one or in small groups.

Aphasia facts

What is Aphasia?

Aphasia is a language disorder caused by stroke or other types of brain injury. Aphasia affects all modalities of language, including the abilities to speak, understand speech, read and write. Over a million people in the US have aphasia, and this number will increase as the population ages. However, few people know about this disorder because people with aphasia have difficulty speaking out for themselves to raise public awareness.

Myths & Truths about Aphasia

Myth: “Only old people get aphasia.”
Truth: While it is true that your risk of having a stroke increases as you age, strokes and other brain injuries can happen to anyone. We have had people as young as 18, and as old as 91, in our aphasia group.

Myth: “People with aphasia can’t speak, but they can read or write.”
Truth: Aphasia affects all modalities of language to some degree. When communicating with someone with aphasia, try different language modalities (speaking, writing key words), as well as non-language modalities (gesturing, drawing).

Myth: “People with aphasia lose the ability to reason like adults.”
Truth: Aphasia is a disorder of language, not intelligence. Although they have difficulty conveying their thoughts, people with aphasia are still the same inside.
Communication Tips to Remember

Make use of different methods, or modalities, of communication:
- facial expression & body language
- gesture & pointing
- simple drawings
- writing key words

Allow extra time for communication.

Get the attention of the person with aphasia first; minimize noise & other distractions.

Include the person with aphasia in important discussions and social conversations.

Clarify & confirm messages using yes/no questions.

Useful Resources
National Aphasia Association
www.aphasia.org

American Stroke Association
www.strokeassociation.org

National Stroke Association
www.stroke.org

Wendell Johnson Speech and Hearing Center
www.uiowa.edu/~comsci/clinical

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MAGIC is a communication support group for people with aphasia and their family members, run by faculty and students in the Department of Communication Sciences & Disorders at the University of Iowa. Our mission is to minimize the impact of aphasia on communication, by teaching, facilitating, and providing opportunities to practice the use of multi-modality communication strategies appropriate to each individual. By doing so, we also aim to minimize the social impact of aphasia by increasing participation in life activities, and by providing psychosocial support from peers and clinicians.

We have been meeting weekly since 2005. Our meetings are held every Thursday during regular University of Iowa fall, spring, and summer semesters, from 6:00 to 7:30 PM at the Wendell Johnson Speech & Hearing Center. Please contact Jean K. Gordon for a schedule, or for more information about the group.

Phone: 319-335-8729
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Aphasia is like pulling words out of thin air...