

10 Tips for communicating with an individual who has Aphasia

Aphasia is a communication disorder caused by damage to the parts of the brain that are responsible for speech and language. Individuals who have aphasia may find it difficult to speak, understand, read and write.

1. Reduce background noise

Individuals who have aphasia will find it easier to communicate in quiet environments. Background noise includes the TV, radio, traffic, and other people speaking.

2. Make sure you have their attention

Ensure that you have the individual's full attention so that they are able to follow what you are saying instead of focusing on something else.

3. Avoid shouting and interrupting

Shouting or interrupting an individual who has aphasia will only increase their levels of frustration. Also avoid finishing off their sentences, unless of course that they request that you do so in certain circumstances.

4. Think about questions

Some questions can have a simple yes/no answer so in certain situations it may be better to use these types of questions. For example, you could ask "would you like a cup of tea?" which is simpler to reply to than "what would you like to drink?"

When using yes/no questions, make sure that the individual is able to use yes/no correctly, Gestures may help to communicate yes/no answers.

5. Time

Speak in a normal voice but at a slower speed to allow the individual time to understand each word you are saying. Allow the individual time to speak too.

6. Use familiar words and phrases

Use words and phrases that you know the individual will understand.

7. Don't focus on the errors

Don't focus on the errors that they make when communicating as this is likely to frustrate the individual and may affect their confidence in some instances.

8. Use all methods of communication

We don't just communicate verbally; in fact most of our communication is non-verbal. Therefore to help an individual with aphasia to communicate, use gesture, body language, facial expression, drawing and writing.

9. Check that you have both understood correctly

People with aphasia may feel patronised if you pretend to understand something they have said. Clarify that you have understood correctly and if you haven't try again, using all aspects of communication such as drawing and gesture to help. Likewise, make sure the individual has understood what you are saying too otherwise they may feel confused and frustrated.

10. Avoid information overload

Focus on one topic at a time and make sure the individual knows when you are changing the topic.