

Hints from the Heart



6 Tips for Connecting to Friends with Aphasia

Aphasia is a disorder caused by damage to the parts of the brain that control language, making it hard to read, write and say what you mean to say. This is most common in adults who have had a stroke, but also caused by brain tumors, infections, injuries or dementia.

Not being able to communicate in the normal way brings on a devastating sense of isolation for people with this disorder and it often causes depression. Learning the basic tips listed below can help you communicate better with your loved one or friend:



- 1. Don't stop calling your friend on the telephone.** It may be hard at first to carry on a conversation, but stopping your regular pattern of contact will only add to your friend's isolation.
- 2. When making a social engagement** over the phone or planning a visit, confirm those plans with their spouse, significant other or caregiver. It may be difficult for your friend to repeat those plans.
- 3. When seeing your friend in person,** talk directly to him or her and not through someone else. In most cases, people with aphasia can understand everything that is being said to them and has nothing to do with loss of intelligence. Treat your friend as an adult, not a child.
- 4. Eliminate as much background noise as you can** when conversing with your friend. Radios, televisions or other conversations going on near-by make it harder for the people with aphasia to process language.
- 5. Don't call attention to or correct grammatical errors** and poor articulation if the basic message is understandable. Most people with aphasia are embarrassed enough about their slurred words or inability to find the right words. Just getting their words out is often a major accomplishment.
- 6. Humor is usually a welcome commodity** to lighten interaction with someone with aphasia. Don't be afraid to use it so long as you remember that the goal is to laugh with your friend and not at him or her.

For more information, go to the National Aphasia Association website at www.aphasia.org.

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