

## **STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE SKILLS**

- Make sure you are speaking face to face with the person.
- Before communication begins, be sure you have your family member's attention.
- Talk in a quiet relaxed environment, free from distractions.
- Ensure only one person is communicating with the person at a time.
- Do speak simply and slowly, but do not "talk down" to the person.
- "Yes/No" questions are easier to respond to than open-ended questions such as questions beginning with "who, what, where, when, why, and how". Tailor your questions to the communication skills of your partner.
- Avoid abstract and vague topics.
- Make every opportunity to engage in conversation, to provide stimulation, talking about topics of interest. Use familiar pictures/visual aids to supplement/illustrate what you are saying
- Admit when you don't understand
- Gesture when you speak
- Unless the person has a documented hearing loss, do not raise your voice to make yourself understood.
- Make sure the information was understood and repeat as necessary.

## **STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE SKILLS**

- Provide the first sound of a word when your family member is having difficulty finding the word to use.
- If you notice that your family member is having difficulty expressing their ideas, have them describe it by appearance, function, shape, size, or color.
- Encourage the use of gestures to supplement your family member's communication.
- Allow enough time for your family member to communicate.
- Provide two or three choices if you feel your family member is having difficulty with communication.
- Before starting a task at home (i.e. getting dressed), have your family member name the items required for completion.
- Try to determine the key idea that the person is trying to communicate then ask yes/no questions to elicit more specific information
- To increase verbal expression, discuss your family member's interest, what occurred during the day, or what they would like to do at a later time.
- Encourage the use of simple words and short phrases to communicate a thought.
- Always reinforce the improvement you notice and refrain from speaking to your family member in a "child-like" manner.
- Give praise at all attempts to communicate. Do not focus attention on errors and avoid criticism.
- Avoid talking for the person as words you use may not be what they intended to say.

- Ability may fluctuate, so some days will be better than others for individual in regards to finding the right words.
- Acknowledge the speech you do understand.
- Encourage the person to use family members' names and say "hello" and "goodbye" and other social exchanges.

## **General Tips**

- You may need to carry the burden of the conversation. Do not limit the conversation to questions, but spend time reassuring and telling the person what is going on.
- Do not be surprised, upset or show amusement if the person swears more than they used to, as swearing can be common following a neurological head injury/stroke. Provide the correct word without showing emotion. Try not to show embarrassment if the person cries easily, maintain communication in a matter of fact way. These extremes of emotions may be very embarrassing and upsetting from them too.
- Never talk about the person in his/her presence as though he/she were not there, no matter how severe the comprehension problems, limited bits of information may be understood, which could be distressing.
- Treat person as normally as possible.
- Encourage friends/family members to visit.
- Use routine activities for speaking and reinforcing therapy techniques. Meal, dressing, medication, and exercises times are good opportunities to encourage this. Provide the name of the objects in use, and describe the function if person is unable or has difficulty.
- Don't correct the person's errors. Rather, restate what you think he or she was saying. This will help establish whether you understand what was said and give the person the opportunity to hear the correct version.

### Web Sites and Addresses for Aphasia Information and Support

National Aphasia Association  
156 Fifth Ave, Suite 707  
New York, NY 10010  
1-800-4622  
<http://www.aphasia.org/>

National Stroke Association  
9707 East Easter Lane  
Englewood, CO 80112-3747  
1-800-STROKES  
<http://www.stroke.org/index.html>