

Guidelines for Communicating with People who have Communication Difficulties

Remain Calm and Positive

- Smile and remain interested even when conversation strays.
- Keep a level head, a calm voice, remain as relaxed as possible.
- Focus on what the person *can* do, not what they can't do.
- Look for opportunities to support interaction.

Keep it Simple

- Speak in short, concrete sentences.
- Rephrase to keep topic focused when person is confused.
- Respond immediately to communication attempts.
- Provide clear choices between no more than two possibilities.

Be Polite

- Make sure the person is willing to have a conversation.
- Maintain eye contact (if culturally appropriate).
- Reassure and support the person if stuck or frustrated.
- Thank the person for having a conversation.

Support All Forms of Communication

- Encourage and validate the use of *any* communication techniques.
- Use pictures or other aids to help with word finding difficulties.
- Encourage pointing and other gestures.
- Encourage facial expressions.
- Encourage writing and drawing.

Reduce Frustration

- Request more information on a topic if unclear.
- Avoid quizzing just to get the “right” answer.
- Do not directly contradict the person even if they are wrong.
- Draw focus away from frustrating or embarrassing problems.

Be Aware and Informed

- Monitor changing needs for communication support.
- Practice using all communication strategies yourself.
- Role play with friends, family and therapists to understand how to handle communication breakdowns.