Communicating with a Person who has Aphasia

Aphasia: a communication disorder that happens when your brain is injured.

- Common causes may include stroke, head trauma, brain tumors, or infections.
- It is estimated that 2,000,000 Americans are affected with aphasia.
- Either due to change in how the brain processes information or muscle weakness or tightness around the mouth.
- Aphasia may affect a person’s ability to process language, but does not affect intelligence.

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<th>Signs of Aphasia</th>
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<tr>
<td>Talking</td>
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<td>- Can’t think of the words you want to say.</td>
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<td>- Use the wrong word, made-up words, or sentences that don’t make sense.</td>
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<td>- Switch sounds in words.</td>
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<td>- Use incomplete rather than full sentences.</td>
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Tips for Communication:

1. Get attention
   a. Get my attention before you start speaking, maybe by saying my name first. Keep eye contact to help maintain attention.

2. Be aware
   a. Watch my body language and use gestures for clues.
   b. Talk to me in a quiet place - remove distractions such as noises, lights, or sounds.

3. Keep mindful, be respectful
   a. Keep your voice at a normal level - you do not need to talk louder unless I ask you to.
   b. Keep the words you use simple but adult - don’t “talk down” to me.
   c. Use shorter sentences - repeat key words that you want me to understand.
   d. Slow down your speech.

4. Use Patience & Creativity
   a. Give me time to speak - it may take me longer but try not to finish my sentences for me.
   b. Try using drawings, gestures, writing, and facial expression.

5. Ask How to Communicate – every person is different!
   a. Ask me to draw, write, or point when I am having trouble talking.
   b. Ask me “yes” and “no” questions - those are easier than questions that I have to answer in words or sentences.

6. People with aphasia are people first
   a. Let me make mistakes sometimes. I may not be able to say everything perfectly all the time.
   b. Let me try to do things for myself. I may need to try a few times. Help me when I ask for it.

Resources, Tips, & Factsheets:

- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (www.asha.org)
- Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center (www.msktc.org/tbi)
- National Aphasia Association (www.aphasia.org)
- Brainline (www.brainline.org)
- BIAA (www.biausa.org)