

Incorporate music

For some people, singing may help make words come easier. Many people who have lost fluent speech can still sing fluently, articulate, and remember all the words to familiar songs. Music can also lighten the mood which may help reduce frustrations with communication.

Be sure to ...

- Speak slowly
- Use simple words
- Be calm and reassuring
- Address the person by name
- Ask one question at a time
- Give the person time to respond
- Restate using different words, if necessary
- Approach the person from the front
- Use humor when possible
- Use touch when appropriate
- Be aware of your non-verbal cues



800.424.2494

ubhc.rutgers.edu/services/geriatric
www.Care2Caregivers.com

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WE CARE

Remember that people with language impairment due to memory loss have a full range of feelings and thoughts. Just because they can't express emotions in words does not mean they are not there. Be kind to yourself and your loved one as you find new ways to communicate. It is a win-win strategy for everyone. If you would like to further discuss strategies for enhancing communication please call the Care2Caregivers helpline. Our dedicated, professional staff members have also been family caregivers, and they are here to listen and guide you.



WHEN YOU CARE • WE ARE THERE

For more information:

Comprehensive Services on Aging (COPSA) has been providing compassionate and sensitive mental health care to the elderly since 1975. A team of Geriatric Psychiatrists, Social Workers and Case Managers are available to assist families with diagnosis and treatment. COPSA also provides training for professionals, family caregivers and the community on issues related to aging, memory and mental health. Care2Caregivers provides resources, referrals, information and supportive counseling to anyone caring for someone with memory loss. Call for help.

HELPLINE: 800.424.2494

RUTGERS HEALTH

University Behavioral Health Care
COPSA Institute for Alzheimer's Disease & Related Disorders

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COMMUNICATION Breaking through the Barriers



Good communication is important for all of us at every age, but when a person has memory loss, there may be challenges that make it extremely hard to communicate.

A person with memory difficulties may have **trouble expressing themselves** in words (expressive aphasia) as well as **problems understanding** what others are saying (receptive aphasia). They may have a hard time **remembering the names of things** (anomia), use the **wrong word** (semantic paraphasia) or **"talk around" a word or idea** (circumlocution).

These difficulties may get worse as the disease progresses. As caregivers, we can learn methods that enhance our ability to have successful communication. Here are some tips that may help.

Listen

Even if you can't understand what a person is saying, encourage them to continue talking until you can pick up the feeling or general gist of what they are trying to communicate. Help them find the words if they are struggling. Give them some words to choose from, or try saying what you think they are attempting to say and then ask them if that is what they mean.



Pay Attention to Non-Verbal Language

The actual words we use only account for a small percentage of our communication. The gestures we use such as head nodding, facial expressions, body posture, and hand/arm movements are all a part of how we convey meaning. The tone of our voice speaks volumes. Ask yourself, "What is my loved one's body language telling me right now?" If they are wringing their hands and pacing around the house, chances are they are anxious about something. Likewise, check in with yourself when you are communicating. Does your body language match what you are saying? Maybe you are saying everything is fine but your fists are clenched and your face looks angry. We can say a lot, even without words. Use this to your advantage by offering a soft touch to the hand or shoulder to reassure a loved one who may be scared or nervous.

Keep it Simple

Try to talk about one thing at a time. Rather than "Today we will take a shower, get dressed, eat breakfast and then go see Aunt Susie.", you might want to say, "It is time to wash up now." After one task is done, then just communicate about the next. Offer choices instead of open ended questions, for instance, "Do you want eggs or oatmeal?" instead of "What do you want to eat?"



Minimize Distractions

A person with language impairment due to memory loss has to work very hard to concentrate and can be easily distracted. Many people in the room, all talking at once, may make it harder for a person to communicate. Even the TV or radio can interfere with a person's ability to comprehend and respond. This is especially true if the person also has a hearing problem. For important conversations, choose a time and a place where there are few distractions. If there is a radio or television on, first turn them off when you want to talk and make sure that you are facing the person, instead of speaking from behind.

Be Patient

Allow ample time. Memory issues can slow down a person's ability to process and articulate language, so talk slowly. If you ask them a question, give them a moment to answer you before you repeat or get angry. If necessary, restate the question using different words after a few minutes.

