

## Speech and Language Therapy

### Aphasia information sheet



#### *What is Aphasia?*

Aphasia (sometimes called dysphasia), is a disorder that results from damage to portions of the brain that are responsible for language. For most people, these are areas on the left side (hemisphere) of the brain. Aphasia usually occurs suddenly, often as the result of a stroke or head injury, but it may also develop slowly, as in the case of a brain tumour, an infection, or dementia. Aphasia can be very mild, and sometimes only affects one form of communication, such as reading. However, it is more common for several aspects of communication to be affected at the same time. Aphasia may co-occur with other speech disorders such as dysarthria or apraxia of speech.

#### *There are different types of aphasia:*

- If your problems are mainly with understanding what is being said, this is called receptive aphasia.
- If you mostly understand others, but have difficulties expressing what you want to say, this is called expressive aphasia.
- A combination of problems that changes all or most of your communication can occur.

#### People with receptive aphasia may:

- Not understand much of what other people say and feel as though others are talking in an unknown foreign language.
- Not understand others if there is background noise or if different people are talking in a group.
- Be able to read newspaper headlines, but not understand the rest of the text.
- Be able to write but unable to read back what they've written.

*People with expressive aphasia may:*

- Not be able to speak at all. They may communicate by making sounds but not be able to form words. They may get stuck on a single word or sound and end up repeating it.
- Much of what they say may be unrecognisable and has limited meaning. They may not realise this and others may wrongly think they are confused.
- Have difficulty speaking in sentences. They may say only single words or very short sentences, missing out crucial words. They may write in a similar way.
- Answer 'yes' or 'no', but mean the opposite so their answers are not reliable.
- Think of the word they want to say, but another word comes out – for example, 'milk' instead of 'water'.
- Describe or refer to objects and places, but not be able to name them.
- Say only a few set words, they may be emotional words, such as swear words.

*How to help:*

- Be open about the problem so people can understand.
- Allow the person plenty of time to talk and check understanding with yes/no questions.
- Simplify language by using short, uncomplicated sentences.
- Repeat the content words or write down key words to clarify meaning as needed.
- Maintain a natural conversational manner appropriate for an adult.
- Minimize distractions, such as a loud radio or TV, whenever possible.
- Include the person with aphasia in conversations.
- Ask for and value the opinion of the person with aphasia.
- Encourage any type of communication, whether it is speech, gesture, pointing, or drawing.
- Avoid correcting the person's speech.
- Help the person become involved outside the home. Seek out support groups such as stroke clubs.