

- ✓ If you have a pen and paper handy, try writing down key words as you speak. The person can always look at the words a second or third time if they haven't understood.

- ✓ Use gestures and facial expressions, and point to what you're talking about. If the person doesn't understand your words, they can understand your gestures.

- ✗ Try not to shout. Aphasia does not affect a person's hearing. In fact, shouting can make it more difficult to understand.

*One in a series of pamphlets about
Speech-Language after
Illness or Injury to the Brain*

*This series written by Justine Hamilton and Deidre Sperry, speech-language pathologists. Adapted with their permission for use by OSLA.
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LEARNING ABOUT APHASIA

UNDERSTANDING



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Some illnesses or injuries can cause damage to part of the brain. A stroke is an example of one of these injuries. A stroke happens when a blood vessel in the brain gets blocked or when it bursts.

A stroke or other brain injury can result in many different problems, depending on the part and amount of the brain that is damaged.

One effect that can result from damage to the brain on speech is called aphasia. The word 'aphasia' can mean many different things. Aphasia can affect a person's ability to speak, understand, read or write, or any combination of these.

This pamphlet explains the effect on understanding.

- Some people have severe aphasia and can hardly understand any words or sentences. Other people have mild aphasia and may only have difficulty understanding a fast conversation with a group of people.
- Aphasia affects a person's ability to understand words and sentences. It does not affect a person's intelligence.
- The illness or injury has just made it difficult for their brain to "translate" your words and sentences into thoughts.

To help you understand what this is like, imagine yourself in a foreign country where you don't speak the language. You would have a lot of trouble understanding what people say to you, but you wouldn't think that you had suddenly lost your intelligence!

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

The best thing to do is to speak with the person who has aphasia and with their speech therapist. They will be able to give you specific ideas about how you can help.

Here are some suggestions to keep in mind when speaking with a person who has aphasia:

- ✓ Speak a little slower. Sometimes all the person needs is some extra time to figure out the meaning of your words.
- ✓ Use shorter sentences. A long, "run-on" sentence is difficult to follow at the best of times!
- ✓ If you're unsure, check with the person to make sure they understood what you said.