

When communicating becomes difficult

When someone's age, disability, injury, or illness is making communication difficult, it can make life very frustrating. Here are some helpful tips to improve communicating with someone who is struggling to communicate:

- face the person down at their eye level
- have a quiet environment, reduce or eliminate distractions such as TV or radio
- ensure one person speaks at a time.
- speak at a normal rate, pausing at the end of each sentence to wait for a reply
- keep sentences short with one question or piece of information
- don't use 'baby talk' or shout.
- they don't appear to understand – repeat or give the information in a different way. eg: “Do you want to visit Meryl?” - “Should we go see Meryl?”
- you're unsure what they've said, ask them to repeat or rephrase, eg: “I didn't quite pick that up – say it again please?” or “I'm having difficulty picking that up, is there a different way you can say it?”
- choices help narrow down expected response. eg: “Would you like tea or coffee?” To help, use containers and show them as you say each choice or write the options down.
- yes or no questions keep the information simple and clear. eg: “Would you like a cup of tea?” **not** “What do you want to drink?”
- check you've understood their message eg: “Are you telling me...?”
- admit when you haven't understood eg: “I'm not understanding you today, can you repeat that for me”
- acknowledge you're aware they know what they want to say but are struggling to get the words out.
- don't assume they aren't able to understand what's said.
- give as much information about what's happening as you can.
- use gestures, writing, drawing, devices, communication notebook or cards.



Therapy Professionals friendly Speech Language Therapists can help make communication easier, just contact us:

Phone: 03 377 5280

Email: admin@tpl.nz.