

Understanding Dementia: Aphasia

The 8 As of Dementia

<i>Anosognosia</i>	<i>Apraxia</i>
<i>Amnesia</i>	<i>Altered Perceptions</i>
<i>Aphasia</i>	<i>Apathy</i>
<i>Agnosia</i>	<i>Attention Deficit</i>

References: https://alzheimer.ca/sites/default/files/documents/day-today-series_communication.pdf

What is Aphasia

Dementia can have a profound effect on language abilities of people living with dementia. This language deterioration is known as **aphasia**.

As the dementia progresses the person with dementia may:

- Create new words for ones that are forgotten • Repeat or get stuck on a word or phrase
- Curse or use other offensive language
- Revert to the language that was first learned
- Talk less than usual
- Have difficulty following instructions with multiple steps
- Lose their train of thought more often
- Lose their ability to make their speech understandable - their language may not make sense to others
- Become totally mute in some cases

The person with dementia may also experience difficulties:

- Finding a word
- Interpreting facial expressions (like a wink or a nod of the head)
- Finishing sentences
- Explaining or understanding abstract concepts (e.g., "I feel blue")
- Following conversations
- Staying on topic
- Organizing words into logical sentences
- Understanding humour, jokes and fast talk

What else could cause communication difficulties?

There are other factors that may cause communication difficulties, including sensory impairments such as hearing and vision loss.

Person-Centred Approach to communication

A person-centred philosophy views people with dementia first and foremost as individuals, with unique attributes, personal values and life history.

Believing communication is still possible and that all behaviour has meaning. Communication remains possible at all stages of dementia. Although it may become difficult to understand what the person is trying to communicate to us, remember that the person's words and actions always have meaning.

Focusing on the person's abilities and skills rather than their deficits. If the person's speech has become hard to understand, use what you know about them and what you feel they might be trying to say to help you interpret their words.

Meeting the person where they are and accepting their new reality. With the progression of the disease, a person's perception of reality can become confused. However, it is their reality. Avoid contradicting them or convincing them that what they believe is untrue or inaccurate. Trying to bring them into your reality or disagreeing with them will cause frustration and make things worse. If they say something you know isn't true, try to find creative ways around the situation rather than reacting negatively.

Non-verbal communication will become increasingly important. As the disease progresses you will have to rely on non-verbal communication more. The person with dementia may use laughter as a way to communicate to others that they are at ease. Watch for behaviour changes, body language and non-verbal signs that may be used to express a feeling or indicate physical discomfort.

Communicate through the senses. As the person approaches end of life, they may lose their capacity for verbal communication and may experience the world primarily through their senses. Use the senses to maintain a connection.

- Touch-** Hold the person's hand and give a gentle massage.
- Smell-** Bring back memories with smells of favourite foods, perfumes or flowers.
- Vision-** Videos or pictures can be comforting & relaxing.
- Hearing-** Be aware of the tone and rhythm of your voice. Music is a universal language. It can soothe, comfort and bring back memories.