

Communicating With People Who Have Unclear Speech

Show respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at and talk directly to the person, not someone who accompanies them • Don't underestimate their ability to understand, participate and make decisions • Confirm whether they want someone with them to assist them to communicate
Identify needs & supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the person's whiteboard and other tools to ensure that all health care providers are aware of their needs and how to support communication • Consider posting the Communication Access and/or Hearing symbol(s)
Ask how	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask what you can do to help the person to understand you • Ask and observe what family and friends do to improve communication
Provide the basics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whenever possible have the person can access dentures, glasses, personal hearing devices and communication tools, boards and devices • Encourage them to use a voice amplifier if their voice is weak or they tire quickly when speaking
Observe and listen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face the person so you can watch their lips and notice facial expressions, gestures and body language • Reduce background noise so you can hear the person better – turn off the TV, music, fans and any unnecessary equipment or move to a quieter location
Take time to save time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wait for the person to finish their message • Don't guess unless they give you permission to do so • Encourage them to take a breath between words or shorten their message if they are short of breath • Remind them to try swallowing or clearing their throat before speaking if they have too much saliva • They may need to slow down by adding pauses, exaggerating each sound, pronouncing each word or breaking longer words into syllables • People are usually less anxious and more cooperative when they are able to express their thoughts, feelings and preferences
Provide choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide choices – have them point to pictures or words • Anticipate what they might need or want to tell you • Confirm what they want by asking yes/no questions and giving choices
Use tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer a pen/paper or keyboard (iPad) to write, type or draw their message • Encourage them to show you what they are talking about with gestures, a communication board or device • Try using rating scales, picture/topic boards or alphabet boards to assist the person to communicate thoughts, needs, preferences and decisions
Confirm understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell the person if you don't understand their message • Repeat back the words you do understand or paraphrase to clarify their message
Access available resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For more information, visit the Communication Access page on MyHealthAB.ca, talk to an audiologist or speech-language pathologist, or contact practice.consultation@ahs.ca

