

## Total Communication

**Total** communication uses a variety of **methods** such as **gesture, sign, drawing, facial expression** and **mime**. It is based on the idea that any means of communication is valuable as long as it works.

### What are the Benefits of Total Communication?

The **struggle** for speech often leads to **frustration** and **anger**. In some cases the difficulties are so great that the person 'gives up'. The effects of communicative failure are felt by everyone close to the person with Aphasia. Even strong **relationships** are likely to be **affected**.

We can **lessen** the **frustration** by **offering** the person with Aphasia an **alternative** to **speech**. Through mediums like **gesture or sign** we can give the person with Aphasia a simple means of **expressing** basic **needs** and keeping up contact with **relatives** and **friends**.

Of course, all people with Aphasia want to **speak** well again. Encouraging **total communication** does not abandon this goal. Alternatives, like **signs**, may actually **stimulate speech**.

**Total communication** helps to motivate the person and offers a commonsense strategy for dealing with communication failure. It does not interfere with the recovery of other language skills such a speech.

### Where do you start?

A good place to **start** is with '**yes**' and '**no**', if this has not already been achieved. Signs for 'yes' and 'no' might be **head nods** and **shakes** or a **thumbs up** and **down**. Many people with Aphasia confuse these two words, i.e. saying yes when they mean no, so achieving his/her goal can make a considerable difference to their communication.

### Where next?

Once '**yes**' and '**no**' are established you could go on to develop a few

**basic needs signs.** These might include: glasses, teeth, razor, comb, toilet, hearing aid etc.

The **best setting** in which to introduce these signs is in their **natural context**, i.e. while dressing or in the bathroom. You could start by demonstrating the **sign** while holding up or pointing to the relevant item. Later you might produce the **gesture** while asking the **person with Aphasia** to **pass** you the **object**.

You can practice the recognition of signs by presenting a series of pictures of the objects and asking the person with Aphasia to point to each one in turn, using a sign as part of your instructions.

### **How to encourage the use of signs**

People with Aphasia learn to recognise **gestures** and **signs** reasonably quickly. However it is often much more difficult to stimulate sign production.

One exercise which may help again uses **objects** and **pictures**. The person with Aphasia is shown a **picture** of an **object**. It is important that you do not see what is in the picture. He/she must **communicate** the **item** to you in such a way that you are able to **pick** the **appropriate** one from a **group** of three or four **objects**.

You may also use '**real life**' situations to **prompt** sign **production**. For example rather than simply handing the person with Aphasia his/her glasses you can wait until there is produced a **clear request** from them in the **form** of a **sign**. Humour can be another way of promoting the use of signs. For example you might think up signs for each family member. These '**name signs**' could draw upon running **family jokes**, such as a paunch gesture for a grandad, or a 'walk-man' **gesture** for a teenage son.

You may have to make a **decision** about whether or not to use **speech** while working on **signs**. Usually you will sign and speak **simultaneously**. Some therapists believe that the **use of speech and signing together** may actually **help** the person with Aphasia to **retrieve words**.