Global Aphasia Tips for Occupational Therapy Practitioners

Pay attention to facial expressions, intonation patterns, tone of voice, and gestures. These can provide a great deal of information about how a person with global aphasia is feeling or what they might be trying to communicate.

Gently touch their arm to gain their attention before talking.

Use simple sentence structures when talking, repeating and writing down key words.

Maintain a natural conversational manner appropriate for an adult.

Use objects of reference. For example, when asking if they want a drink, show them their cup.

Also, comprehension is often reported to be better than verbalization, so patients may also become adept at interpreting nonverbal communication through gestures and facial and body language. This nonverbal comprehension may be mistaken for comprehension of the spoken word. Use gestures to support your spoken communication.

Minimize distractions, such as a loud radio or TV, whenever possible.

Provide communication “ramps” to support expressive and receptive communication, just as you would provide a physical ramp for someone using a wheelchair. Communication ramps may include objects, pictures, maps, or calendars, as well as tools such as pen and paper.

Offer choices using pictures, words, or objects to support understanding, expression, and decision-making.

Minimize distractions and allow time for the person to respond.

Avoid correcting the person’s speech.

Don’t ask “quiz” questions (i.e. questions like “Is your name John?”). This can feel demeaning and be confusing. Ask questions, using supports, that elicit new information, such as needs, feelings, or preferences.

Even if the person cannot fully understand or respond, don’t speak as if they’re not there. They may understand more than you realize, and they pick up on non-verbal cues. Engage the person as much as you can so they do not feel ignored or unimportant.