



Speech and Language Therapy Services

# Encouraging Communication

## Gaining attention: starting a conversation

- Stop what you are doing
- Cut down distractions and background noise
- Make sure the person can hear you
- Touch their arm
- Get close to them with your face on the same level as theirs
- Get eye contact with them
- Say their name.

## Speaking to the person

- Speak at a normal steady rate
- Speak slightly louder than normal – don't shout
- Start with their name
- Emphasize the important words
  - Say them a little louder, pause before them
  - Use shorter sentences
  - Break down a longer sentence into shorter chunks
- Use gestures and pointing while you talk
- Watch for signs of understanding. Be ready to repeat it or say it another way

## Helping the person join in

- Give them a choice of two options:
  - 'Do you want ..... or .....?'rather than asking a yes/no question:
  - 'Do you want .....?'
- If they do not pause in conversation, use their name, touch or a 'sh' gesture. Start talking when they stop
- If they get stuck for a word and you know it, give the first sound of the word to jog their memory:

- 'It's B \_\_\_\_\_' (Benny) or 'It's a tooth B \_\_\_\_\_' (brush)

or use a lead-in phrase:

- 'It's a cup of t \_\_\_\_\_' (tea)
- Encourage their efforts by praise, nodding, smiling. Show when you have understood. Don't worry about mistakes if you can understand
- Put a 'tag' question at the end of what you say - (don't you? won't it? didn't she?) – to invite them to answer
- If you do not understand, check if it is something important. Try to keep a two-way exchange going
- Tell them when you are changing the topic of conversation

### **Encouraging conversation**

- Remove background noise and distractions
- Give plenty of time, pause before you prompt them or answer for them
- Respond to the feelings as well as the words. Watch their face, gestures and listen to their tone of voice
- Provide things to talk about: activities, outings, photos, books, magazines, visitors, memories
- Treat any attempt to communicate as important
- Praise their attempts, show empathy if they are frustrated
- Conversations on a one-to-one basis are easier than in a group

### **Try not to...**

- Test them or re-teach them
- Talk across them
- Correct them
- Show your anger or frustration
- Ask lots of questions

Let talking become a stress

### **Cues, props and prompts**

- A diary with simple sentences in, to remind the person of recent events
- A word book with names of family and places that they often use
- A life story book with photos and simple sentences to provide something to talk about, a cue for their memory and a sense of identity
- An environment which changes: a window, a trip out, visitors, new objects or pictures: things to talk about