

Clear Speech Strategies

Description

Strategies are used by a person and their communication partners so that the person's speech is easier to understand.

Benefit

Adults and children whose speech is hard to understand due to slurred or distorted speech, weak voice, rapid or slow speech rate or other differences (e.g., nasality). Speech may be affected by conditions such as stroke, ALS, MS, Parkinson's, brain injury, Cerebral Palsy or developmental delays.



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Tips

Communication partners can:

- Face the person and watch their lips or notice nonverbal cues such as their facial expressions, gestures and body language.
- Reduce background noise, including music and fans so you can hear the person better.
- Be honest, gently tell them when you don't understand their message rather than pretending to understand.
- Repeat back the words you did understand or paraphrase to clarify their message.
- Be patient, waiting for the person to speak and to clarify their message.

The person may be able to compensate for their difficulties. If they are:

- Limited in their respiratory capacity, they can try taking a breath between words or shortening their message by only saying short phrases or the key words. A voice amplifier may help.
- Producing excessive saliva, they can try swallowing or clearing their throat before speaking.
- Speaking quickly, they can try slowing down their rate by exaggerating each sound, pronouncing each word, breaking words into syllables, or pausing often.

Additional information can be obtained to understand the message if their speech is supplemented:

- Offer them a pencil and paper or device to write, draw or type their message.
- Ask yes/no questions or a topic communication board to clarify what is being discussed.
- Encourage them to show you what they are talking about with gestures, a communication board or device.
- The person can point to the first letter of each word on an alphabet board as they speak so they slow down the rate of their speech. This will provide you with cues to narrow down the options for what they are saying and to distinguish word boundaries.
- Encourage the person to use a voice amplifier if they have a weak voice and/or tire quickly when speaking.

See [AHS.ca Communication Access](https://www.ahs.ca/Communication-Access) for more Communication Access information. For further learning and support, please contact your local audiologist, speech-language pathologist or practice.consultation@ahs.ca.



COMMUNICATION ACCESS

Alberta Health Services