

Strategies to Enhance Communication

Introduction

It is important to understand that communication is a two way process, and that changes in one person mean that modifications are often required on the part of those around them to make communication successful and enjoyable.

It is therefore important to devise a system to establish an effective way of communicating needs, feelings and emotions. Both parties can use these strategies:

1. **Slow rate of speech**

Model this yourself. Pause between sentences. Encourage the person with HD to "slow down a bit" so that words do not run together.

2. **Overemphasize key words**

The main goal is to understand the basic message being conveyed. You can do this by saying, "just tell me the main words of what you want to say".

3. **Repeat or rephrase the message**

Ask them to repeat or rephrase their message. "I am sorry, I am not following that; can you tell me again in other words?"

4. **Simplify the message/offer cues**

Ask the person to show you via gesture or pointing to clarify the message.

You can achieve this by asking questions. "Tell me the two main words. Give me the key word or thought."

5. **Ask for clarification**

Repeat message back. "Did you say . . .?"

6. **Spell part of the message**

"Could you spell that?" You can use verbal spelling, written spelling or a letter board.

7. **Use Yes/No questions (be specific)**

This makes responding to questions easier.

8. **Refocus the person on topic**

Use the person's name or say "We are talking about now".

9. **Go from general to specific**

For example "Are you talking about family?" then "Are you talking about your daughter?", etc.

10. **Monitor perseverative (repetitious) behaviour and provide feedback**

Reduce the number of times you change topics during a conversation.

Allow some time to pass before introducing a new topic.

Let the person know when they are stuck on a topic. "Let's talk about now".

11. **Allow adequate time for communication**

This means making time to fully understand the message and giving the person time to think of a way to respond.

12. **Reduce distractions when having a conversation**

13. **Use communication aids if they have been found to be useful**

Letter boards, Word boards, Picture boards
All communication aids need to be designed individually and change, as the person's needs change.

The basic guideline in achieving effective communication is for the listener to consciously **accept the responsibility** for the conversation exchange. Because of the cognitive deficits, which occur, the person with HD often needs to rely on external cues and guidance from the listener to achieve communication. It is also important to realise that whilst you accept the responsibility for the exchange, you must not control the conversation.

When interacting with a person with HD who has communication difficulties, it is recommended that you speak with a Speech Pathologist to help you implement, monitor and adjust communication strategies.

REMEMBER

IT IS THE SKILLS THAT DEGENERATE, NOT THE NEED TO COMMUNICATE

Taken from Australian Huntington Disease Association (Inc.)