

# Communication Repair Strategies

## What is a communication breakdown?

Communication breakdowns occur whenever the speaker is not understood by the listener. Everyone experiences communication breakdowns at some point. Many variables can contribute to communication breakdowns.

## Communication repair strategies can:

- Help individuals who have difficulty being understood in situations because of unclear speech
- Increase successful communication experiences, improve social participation and decrease frustration

- Gently increase the individual's awareness of communication breakdown. You may say "I can see you're trying to tell me something, but I didn't understand"
- Ask questions in a different way, possibly limiting the range of likely response:
  - Give a choice question. If you initially asked, "what do you want to eat?" You could change it to "do you want a cookie or an apple". This gives the person an immediate model to copy
  - Ask questions to establish a category and narrow down the topic (e.g. is it a food? Toy?)
  - Ask them to "show" you what they mean (e.g. gestures, visuals, written words or AAC)
- Ask for a repetition - tell the person the parts of their message you understood and ask them to either repeat or rephrase the parts you misunderstood
- Ask for the first letter of the word or if they can try to spell or write it
- Look for clues by observing facial expressions and gestures, or considering the context
- Interpret as much as you can- this allows you to provide a model and also confirm that the message has been understood
- Reduce background noise during conversations and ensure proper lighting
- Encourage the individual to use their own repair strategies

## Try to avoid:

- Asking for more than one repetition without altering the question in some way or providing support
- Insisting they repeat words or phrases after you; instead keep encouraging their attempts!
- Becoming frustrated, or leave the individual feeling frustrated or disappointed