

Communication Toolkit

How to support people with
aphasia in a group setting

Rebuilding lives after stroke

Stroke
Association



What is the Communication Toolkit?

This **Communication Toolkit** is for volunteers who **run stroke support groups**.

The Toolkit **gives information** about how to **support** people with **communication difficulties** in a **group** setting.

Every person's communication **needs** are **different**.

You might find **different strategies** work for **different people**.

What does the Communication Toolkit contain?



The Toolkit is in **two parts**.

The **first part** includes some **information** and **tips** about communication difficulties.

This **includes** how to:

- Make your **group activities** more **accessible**.
- **Share information**.
- **Tips** for guest **speakers**.



The **second part** is information about **tools** which you and your group members can use.



Top tip

This is a **reference** guide with **suggestions** for your group. Do take the ideas that work for you and your group members.

Contents

If you would like to learn about **communication difficulties**, go to **pages 4 – 6**.

For tips on supporting people with communication difficulties in **groups**, go to **pages 7 – 9**.

If you want your group **activities** to be more **accessible**, go to **page 10**.

For **more information** and tools from our **Communication Support Pack**, go to **pages 12 – 15**.

If you are **writing** a document for people with **aphasia**, see **pages 16 – 18**.

For **tips** on supporting people with communication difficulties on a video **call**, go to **pages 19 – 23**.

If you have **guest speakers**, you can find a letter and tips to send them on **pages 24 – 26**.

For **tips** on how **technology** can help, go to **pages 27 – 28**.

For a **summary** of ideas to make meetings more accessible, go to **pages 29 – 31**.

Information about communication difficulties



It is **different** for **everyone**.

It depends on:

1. **The part** of the **brain** that is **damaged**.
2. The **size** of the **damaged** area.



The **main types** of **communication problem** are:

- Aphasia.
- Dysarthria.
- Apraxia of speech.

It is possible to have **more than one type** of communication problem.

Aphasia



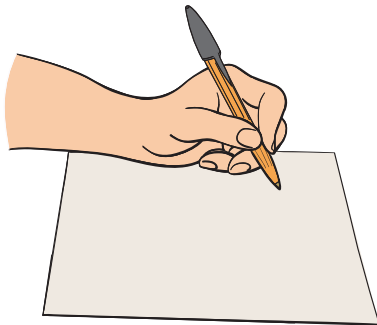
Aphasia is when the **language areas** of the brain are **damaged**.

About **40%** of people have aphasia **soon after** a stroke.

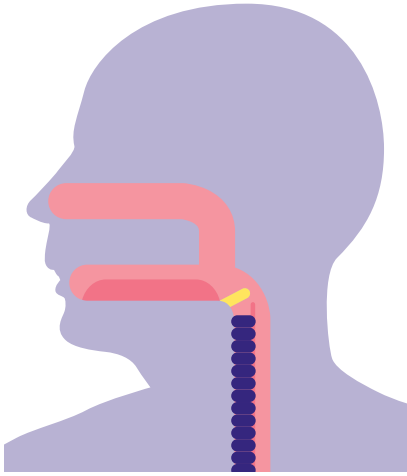


Aphasia can cause **problems** with:

- Speaking.
- Understanding what people say.
- Finding the right words.
- Reading.
- Writing.
- Using numbers.



It does **not** mean you are **less intelligent**.



Dysarthria

A stroke can cause **muscle weakness** in the **mouth** and **throat**.

This can make it **hard** to **speak, eat** or **drink**.

Speech can be **slurred**.

It can be hard for **others** to **understand**.

More than **half** of all stroke survivors will have **dysarthria**.

Apraxia of speech

Apraxia can make it hard to **coordinate** the movement of the **mouth** and **tongue**.

When speaking, **words** can sound **wrong**.

The person might **know a word**, but **not** be able to **say** it.

Seven tips for supporting people with communication difficulties in a group



1. **Make sure everyone can reach a pen and paper.**
Your group might prefer to use a **whiteboard** and **marker**.
Some members might like to use their own **notebook**.



2. **Print out the “Conversations are better if..” sheet**
(see example on page 9).
Or order a copy from the **Group resources** order form on the intranet.
You might want to have a **session** where you **discuss** the points.
Your group might have additional **suggestions**.
Display the **sheet** at the group and give each **member** a **copy**.



3. **Some people find images helpful to support their communication.**
This **may vary** between groups.
You will **learn** which are best through **trial** and **error** over time.
You can also **ask** your group member or their friends and family about what images might be **helpful**.

You can find images to support your members in our ‘**Communication Picture Book**’. See **page 12** for more information.



4. **Always try to plan ahead.**
You might be able to **adapt** an **activity** to suit the different needs of the group.

For **example** if you are running a **quiz** you might:

- Use **visual clues**.
- Let members **work in groups**.
- Let members **write, speak** or **point** to the answer.



5. Try to remove distractions.

Remember people with communication problems can find **group** settings **difficult**. Keep the **noise** levels **low**.

Try **splitting** the **group** into **smaller groups** for some **activities**.



6. Try to make sure only one person is talking at a time.

This allows everyone to **focus** and **listen**.

The group **leader** might need to **remind** the **group**.



7. Try to make sure that every group member has had the opportunity to communicate.

If someone seems **quiet** or **distracted**, try to **follow up** after the session.

Ask if there are other **ways** you can **support** them.



Top tip

When using **written** material, use **blank paper** to **cover up** other information on the page which is **not** the **focus**.



Top tip

Time out:

If you are both **struggling** to **communicate**, take a **break**.

Together **agree** to take a time out and **come back** to the conversation **later**.

Conversations are better if...

It is useful to have this **guide** to refer to during group sessions.



1. We **value** the **views** of all group members and **respect** that they may have a **different opinion**.



2. We **listen** to one another and make sure everyone can join in discussions.



3. We try **not** to **interrupt** each other.



4. We try to be **patient** with one another and **give** each other **time** to respond.



5. We try to make sure that any member who wants to **join in** the discussion **can**.



6. We try to make all **activities** and **materials** accessible for people **with communication difficulties**.



Top tip

You could create your own "Group communication is better if..." **document** as an **activity** at the group.

Making your group activities more accessible



Images can be used by you and members to **communicate** more **easily**.

For example, when **ordering a drink**.

A person might **point** to a **picture** of a cup of tea.



You can then **confirm** that you have understood by saying that you will **get** them a cup of **tea**.

You can also find out **extra information**, for example, if they would like milk or sugar.

Remember only ask **one question** at a **time**.



On the other hand, if you ask someone what they would like to **drink** and they **do not understand**, **pointing** to the **image** as you ask will **help**.

An image could be a **photograph**, **illustration** or **icon**.

It is **important** that the images are **adult-appropriate** and not designed for children.



How to use the images in your group

For face-to-face meetings it can be helpful to have **images** on the **table** for members to use.

They should be within easy **reach**.

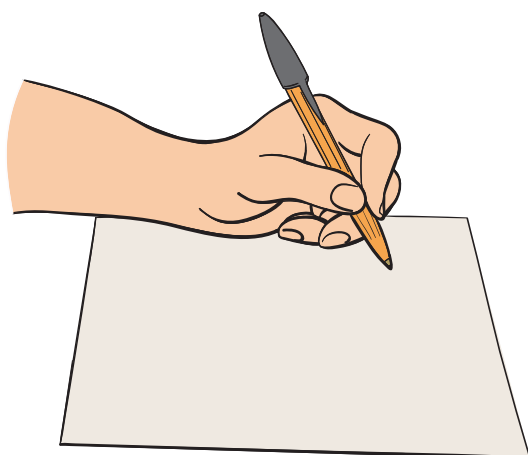
They can then be used as often as the members need.

It will be helpful to **explain** to the group how these are used so that everyone can make **use** of them.

You could also use a group **flipchart** or **whiteboard** to write down key points as you go along.

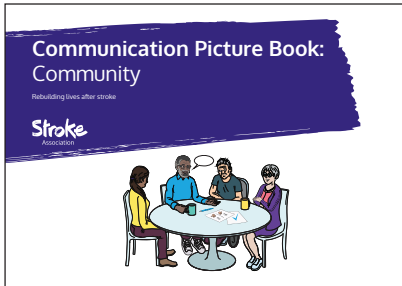
When using **pictures**, make sure it is **obvious** what they are, that they are **large** enough and include a short description or **word**.

You can use the pictures in the Communication **Support Pack** on the next page for this or use your own.



Communication Support Pack

Our Communication Support Pack is full of essential **accessible information** and communication **tools**.



- **Communication Picture Book: Community**

This is useful for members who have a **moderate to severe communication difficulty**.

The **pictures** and **icons** in the book cover a wide range of everyday topics.

Members can use these to tell people about themselves, **express** their **wants** and **needs** and make **decisions**.

Members can **personalise** their **Communication Picture Book**.

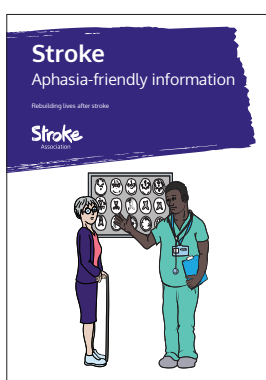
They **might** want to **include** information about their **family** and **hobbies**.

Volunteers and **carers** can also use the **pictures** in meetings to **confirm** they have **understood**.



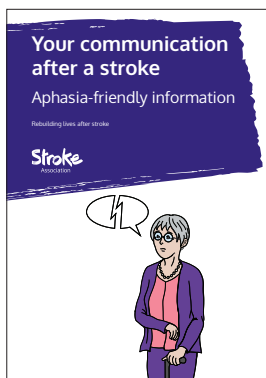
- **Communication problems after a stroke - guide.**

This guide provides **information** and practical **advice** about **supporting** someone with **communication difficulties** after a stroke.



- **Stroke – aphasia friendly guide.**

Our stroke guide can help your group members with aphasia **understand** more about **stroke**, and how to move forwards.



- **Your communication after a stroke – aphasia friendly guide.**

The guide **explains** what **aphasia** is and provides **practical information** and tips on how to communicate well.

It can help **answer** your members **questions** about communication difficulties.

Improve your members **understanding** of aphasia and other communication problems.

Helpline: 0303 3033 100
stroke.org.uk

Stroke
Association

Name: _____

Tel: _____

Emergency contact: _____

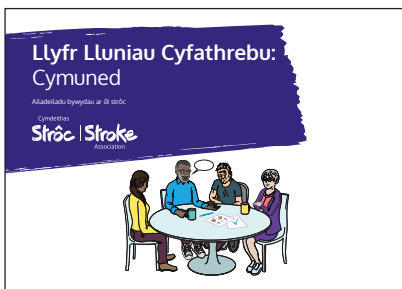
Item code: A03AC
The Stroke Association is registered as a charity in England and Wales (No 218015) and in Scotland (SC037789).
Also registered in the Isle of Man (No. 945) and Jersey (No. 221), and operating as a charity in Northern Ireland.

- **Communication card**

A wallet-sized **card** to **tell others** they have had a stroke and may struggle to communicate.

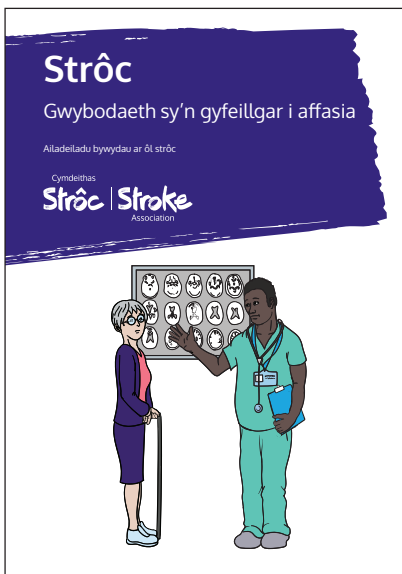
**I have had a stroke
and find it difficult to
speak, read or write**

Please give me time to communicate.
Speak clearly, taking your time and
write down key words. Your help and
patience would be appreciated.



- This pack is available in **English** and **Welsh**.

Our communication tools have been **created** with **people with aphasia** and other communication difficulties and healthcare professionals.



They are **easy-to-read** and **accessible**.



Order your pack for free from our website **stroke.org.uk/aphasia**

Summary of do's and don'ts

Do



Don't



- Try a **different** word.



- Talk too **fast**.



- **Repeat** what you said.



- Talk too **loud**.



- Use more hand **gestures**.



- **Interrupt**.



- **Point**.



- **Pretend** to understand.



- Use more **facial expressions** and face the person



- Give extra **time**.



- **Check** you both understand.



Top tip

Why not have this **page open** as a **reminder** at your **meetings**?

Making your written material more accessible

It is important you make the **written material** at your group more **accessible** for people with aphasia so they have equal access to all information. We've condensed our top tips to help you make your materials accessible using **six easy steps**. Give it a go and see how much it could benefit your group members.

Lucy is making the tea. **(active)**

The tea is being made. **(passive)**

✓ Place ✗ Venue

✓ Information ✗ Info

1. Stay on topic

- **Cut** out anything **unnecessary**.
- Keep **different points separate**.

2. Use clear sentences

- Stick to **short** sentences (around **5 words**).
- Stay on **topic** (keep to the point).
- **Active** sentences are easier than passive (see right).

3. Use clear words

- Try to use **common** everyday words (see right).
- Use **whole** words (see right).

4. Layout

- Leave plenty of **space between key** chunks of **information**. This helps break it into manageable size and makes it **easier to read**.

Titles look good in bold large colour

General text can be **smaller**, but remember to highlight **key words** and keep text **dark** to stand out from the background.



Tea

5. Text

- Use **font sizes** between **14** and **18**.
- Use **sans serif font**, such as **Arial** or **Calibri**.
- Only use **capitals** for the **first letter** of the word.
- Make **key points bold** and **two sizes larger** than the rest of the text.
- Do **not underline** text or use **italics**.
- Use **dark** coloured **writing** on a **white background**.

6. Visuals

- **Use pictures** to support your text.
- Use **clear**, high **quality** pictures.
- Make sure pictures are **relevant**.
- **Images** should be placed on the **left hand side** of your **text**. This is so a person can **get the context before reading** the text.



Top tip

Check the readability of your sentence using **Microsoft Word**. This will grade your text. You can reduce your reading grade by using shorter words and reducing your sentence length.

For Word 2007-2010: Click Review / Spelling and Grammar / Options / tick 'Show readability statistics' / OK

For Word 2003: Click View / Toolbar / Review / Grammar and Spelling. Then follow steps above from 'Options' onwards.

Accessible invitation email (example)

You can find a **digital** copy of the invitation email in the **Resources** page on the **intranet**.

If you prefer a **printed** letter, you can **order** one through our Resources form on the **intranet**. Do contact your local staff member for **support** if needed.

New Message — ↗ ✕

Dear John,

RE: **Whythenbury Stroke Support Group**

Invitation to join our support group **meeting**.

The **group** offers peer **support, activities** and **outings** for people affected by stroke.

We meet every **Wednesday**

Time: **2.00pm**

Address: **Nearside Road, Wherever SP0 376**

See enclosed **Map**

If you need more **information**:

Email: whoever@yahoo.com

Phone: 0209 555 7412

We **hope** you will **join** us and look forward to **welcoming** you.

< photo of group >

Yours sincerely,

Name
Stroke group name

Send 🗑️ ⋮

Supporting people with communication difficulties on a video call

Video calls **may need** some **adaptations** for people with communication difficulties.



Knowledge

It is **important** that you **know** as much as possible about the group **member** and their communication **challenges**.

1. What **support** they have at home.
2. Their personal **needs** and **goals**.
3. Their **level** of language and **communication**.
4. Their **experience** and confidence with **video calls**.



Setting up

- Try to **allow** enough **time** at the start for **setting up** devices.
- Try to **minimise** distractions and **noise**. If this is not possible, mute yourself until the noise passes.
- Make sure a **tablet** or **phone** is propped up so it is **not** being **held**.
- **Check** device **settings**.

If the **sound** or **visual** quality of the call is **not good** it may be worth **ending** call and **trying again**.



Size of group

Try having **three to four people** with communication difficulties for **every one volunteer**. It gives group **members** more **opportunity** to practise communication.

For **larger groups**, **breakout rooms** can be used to create smaller conversations.



Preparation

Everyone on the call should have **access** to **visual aids** to support speech.

Useful tools include:

- **Pen** and **paper**.
- **Pictures** and/or photos.
- Physical **objects** they/you wish to speak about.
- Copy of our **Communication Picture Book**.



Good conversation tips on a video call

Look at the **Do's** and **Don'ts** page on **page 15** of this toolkit.

Humour helps especially with technical problems!

Look for **signs of tiredness**. It may be **better** to run the session in the **morning**.

Video calls can be overwhelming and **exposing**. People may **feel** quite **vulnerable**.

Short, well-prepared calls are probably **best**.

Use the call to **give praise**.

Let them know of the **tools** in **advance**. For example, suggesting at the **beginning** of the **meeting** that members can use a **hand gesture** to ask to speak and to show they have finished talking.

You could allocate a volunteer to set up the **technology** and act as a '**spotter**' to look out for people who would like to **speak** or are **struggling**.

Guidance for supporting a member during an emergency – on a video call



Emergencies at groups are **rare**. If one does happen, these points will help you.

1. Have a **list** of the group's **emergency contact** details. But it **may** be **best** to **contact emergency services** first.
2. If a **member** becomes **unwell**, you may want to **move** their **video** into their own **breakout room** with a volunteer to reduce distress for other group members.
3. **Do not turn off** their **camera** or **mute** them as you will not be able to turn it back on again.
4. **After** the situation, give the **group** the **opportunity** to **talk** about it.

Support from family members and carers on video calls

Family members and/or carers often play an **important role** with video calls.

They can **help** set them up and deal with **technical issues**.

But **family** members **may** also **speak** for the **person** with communication difficulties.

In these instances, you could **set** out **expectations** and **share** the **members'** **goals** ahead of time.

For example, **discussing** that the **purpose** of the group is to support the group **member** to:

- Practise communication.
- Build independence.
- Feel more confident.

You could also **gently remind** them **during** the session or have a **follow-up discussion** after the video call.

These phrases could be helpful:

"This **group** is **for** people with **communication difficulties**."

"This is **time** for people with **aphasia** to **communicate**."

Ending the call

Try to **end** the call on a **positive note**.

Ask people with **communication difficulties** if the meeting was **helpful**.

Encourage them to **communicate how** it could be **better**.

Planning for a guest speaker

If you would like to invite a **guest speaker** to your group, how can you make this **accessible**? The key is **planning**. Make sure that you have given the guest speaker information on communication difficulties before the meeting and planned support for your members, if needed.

What do they need to know?

Group members



Time: how **long** will the talk be? Do you need to plan some **breaks**?



Questions: can group members **ask questions**? If so, do they have the **right communication aids** to do so?



Support: are all members **confident** to **speak** out? Or will they **need support** from a volunteer? If so, seat a volunteer next to them beforehand.

Guest speaker



Information: you can use the **email template** on the next page by downloading it from the Resources page on the **intranet** or you can order a **printed letter** from the Resources order form on the **intranet**. Do ask your **local staff** contact for any **support**.



Tips: **provide** the guest **speaker** with our resource on the intranet "**Guest speaker top tips**" on email or order a **printed** copy through our Resources order form on the **intranet**. Do ask your **staff contact** for **support** if needed.



Support: offer your **support** if they would like to **learn more** about the communication difficulties at your group.



Dear Guest Speaker,

Thank you for agreeing to talk at our stroke group.

I would like to give you some **information about** our group **members** which may be useful.

Some of our members have **communication difficulties** such as aphasia. They may have trouble expressing themselves when **speaking, reading** or **writing**. Or they may find it hard to **understand** what is being said. It is important to note their intelligence isn't affected.

Some of our group **members** can find **talks difficult**, for example listening for a **long period** of time, **saying** questions effectively and being able to **understand**. However, there are some **simple steps** that can make the **talk easier** for our group members and yourself.

Please look at our '**Guest speaker top tips**' for some helpful **hints** and feel free to get in touch with any questions.

We look forward to seeing you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Name

Stroke Group Name

Send



Guest speaker top tips



Written material

- Keep information **short** and on topic (about five words per sentence).
- Use **common** words.
- **Avoid abbreviation**, write words in full.
- **Use 1.5 line spacing**, this makes the text **easier to read**.
- **Don't capitalise whole words, underline words or use italics.**
- Use a **clear font** like Arial.
- Use **images with text** if they help provide context.
- If possible, provide a simple **hand-out** with images **beforehand**.



Language

- **Limit** information to small chunks at a time.
- Use **clear** words and avoid jargon.
- Give people **extra time** to process information.
- Make sure everyone can **hear** and **see** you.
- Try to use **gestures** throughout to emphasise your point.
- Use clear **facial expressions**.
- Have **breaks** to check that everyone is following the conversation.

Technology



Technology can **help communication**.

Try different things and see what works for your members.

Aphasia can **affect** how your members use **technology**.



Video call

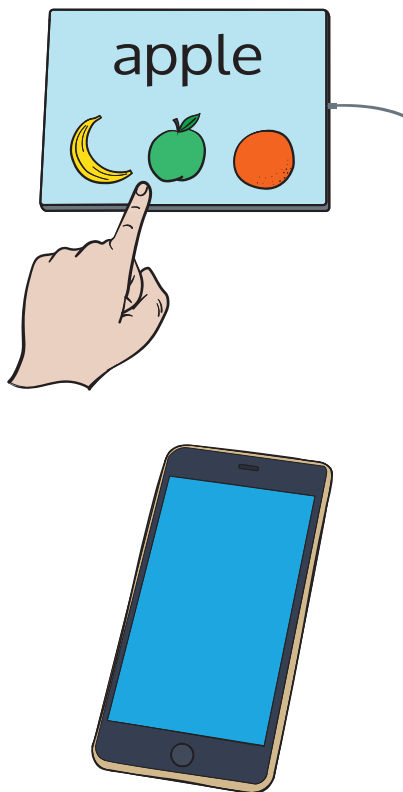
On a video call, you can **gesture**, **type** keywords and show facial **expressions** to support your members.



Try using pictures

Use technology to **show** a YouTube **video** in a conversation about favourite music.

Use a **map** to show where you or your group member went on **holiday**.



Technology can help with **reading** and **writing**.

Your members can use **text-to-speech** which will **read** documents **aloud** and **predictive text** on phones and tablets.

This helps by **guessing** what word or **phrase** your members will write next.

We have created a **guide** to **support** people with aphasia to **use technology**. You can order the guide for free from our **website**.

You can also **watch videos** about the guide on **YouTube**.

Apps for communication

Therapy apps can **help** your members continue their **communication practice**.

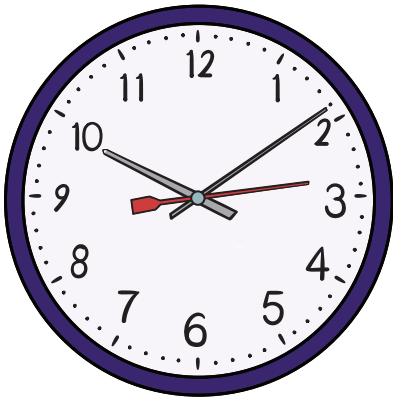
An **app** might help **one person** with communication difficulties. But this does not mean it would help **all** people.

We have looked at the most **commonly used** communication therapy apps.

We are **not endorsing** or **recommending** any of the apps but rather sharing information.

To see **more** therapy apps visit **Aphasia Software Finder** online www.aphasiasoftwarefinder.org

Summary of ideas for making meetings more accessible



Communication

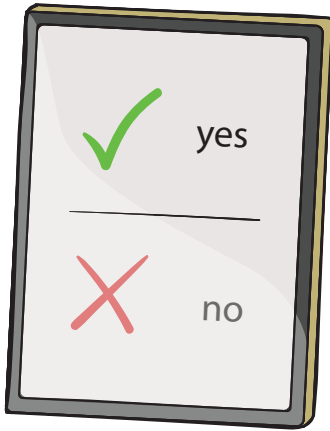
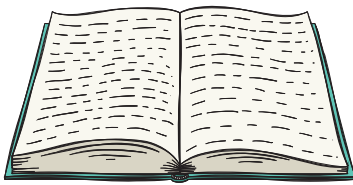
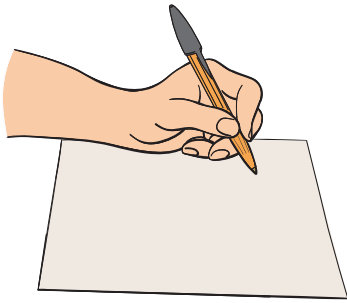
- If you are giving the group **instructions**, make sure they are **short** and **simple**, have a **written** version and check you have both understood.
- Try to use simple, clear **words** and **avoid** jargon.
- Give extra **time** for people to process information and respond.
- Make sure that everyone can **hear** and **see** you easily.
- Use **gestures** to emphasise what you are saying.
- Use **facial expressions** to emphasise what you are saying.



Written material

- **Limit information** to small manageable chunks (cut out anything that is not needed).
- Keep **sentences** short and simple (aim for five words per sentence).





Checklist

Items you could use for your activity.

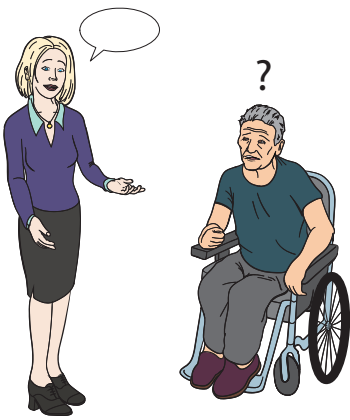
- Easy grip pens, pencils and paper.
- Flipchart.
- Large marker pens (in different colours).
- Communication tools from the Stroke Association.
- Relevant images or photographs.
- Books or magazines.
- Maps.
- Group conversations work better if... sheet (see example on **page 9**).
- Laptop or iPad.



Making activities accessible

Plan how you might **adapt** your activities.

- **Reduce distractions.**
- Try to have **one** person **talking** at a time.
- Try to give **everyone** the **chance** to share their opinion.
- Try to have a **volunteer** available to **support** the member with aphasia.



Top tip

These are **suggestions** that may help with your group members. There is no **pressure** to do them **all**. Do **choose** the **ones** that **work** for your group.

A **stroke** happens **every five minutes** in the UK.

Stroke **changes lives**.

Recovery is **tough**.

But with the **right specialist support** the brain can **adapt**.

Our **specialist support, research and campaigning** are only possible with the support of the **stroke community**.

With more **donations** and **support** we can **rebuild** even more **lives**.

Contact us

We're here for you. Contact us for expert information and support by phone, email and online.

Stroke Helpline: **0303 3033 100**

From a textphone: **18001 0303 3033 100**

Email: **helpline@stroke.org.uk**

Website: **stroke.org.uk**

Rebuilding lives after stroke

Stroke
Association

Item code: **A08STB** © Stroke Association 2023

The Stroke Association is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales (No 61274).

Registered office: Stroke Association House, 240 City Road, London EC1V 2PR.

Registered as a charity in England and Wales (No 211015) and in Scotland (SC037789).

Also registered in the Isle of Man (No. 945) and Jersey (No. 221), and operating as a charity in Northern Ireland.