

Listening to people with unclear speech

Dysarthria is the name given to difficulty in forming words clearly. Conversations can be difficult and while there are lots of strategies that the person with dysarthria is probably already using to help you understand, there is lots that you can do too. Here are some things to think about when talking to somebody with unclear speech:



Environment:

Turn off the TV or radio to make the room quiet



Watch:

Sit face to face with the person - Pay full attention. Watch their lip movements. Look for clues about what the person wants to say (body language/facial expressions).



Wait:

Count to 5 in your head before saying anything else or changing your question. For people with Dysarthria it can take a while to co-ordinate taking a breath before they can even start to talk. If you interrupt, that process has to start all over again.



Check:

If you've understood some words in a sentence, repeat them back. This way you can check you've got the right idea, and the person only has to repeat the words that have not been understood.
Do not pretend you understand if you don't!



Improvise:

Work together to communicate effectively. Remind the person of useful strategies like: "Can you say it any slower?" "Can you say it any louder?" "Can you over pronounce the word?" "Can you break the word into chunks?" (tel-e-vis-ion).

Pointing, gesturing or writing things down may be easier. Ask questions like, "Can you show me?" "Can you write it?" "Can you spell it on an alphabet board?"



Include:

In group situations, the person may need you to create opportunities for them to join in. Use the strategies above to notice

[Type here]

Most important is that you work as a team.

Find out what works for you in your situation. Communication is about connecting with others, and on the whole, it should be an enjoyable and fulfilling activity.