

Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia (SCA™)

What does Aphasia look like?

An individual with Aphasia may have trouble speaking and understanding reading and writing. These problems make communication a challenge. Adults with Aphasia retain many of the cognitive and social skills present prior to the onset of Aphasia. These skills may be hidden or masked by the Aphasia.

What does communication look like within the context of Aphasia?

Aphasia is most often caused by a stroke or other types of brain injury or brain illness. Primary Progressive Aphasia is a degenerative neurological condition in which language abilities become more impaired, slowly, over time. The speed and degree of the change is very individual.

Communication strategies that help establish and maintain social connections and facilitate the accurate exchange of information will help for all types of aphasia. Communication includes establishing social connections and revealing what one knows, thinks, and feels. Consequently, individuals with Aphasia may appear less competent in the eyes of others and, as a result, may be treated as though they are less competent. This can result in decreased participation in all aspects of social and community life, with potentially devastating consequences to self-esteem and quality of life.

What is Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia (SCA™)?

SCA™ is an evidence-based conversation partner training method that can be used flexibly as both a communication access tool and as a conversation therapy tool. It is designed to ensure that people who “know more than they can say” feel as though their competence is acknowledged. The use of SCA™ also improves the accurate exchange of information, opinions, and feelings.

The techniques and tools include the addition of visual supports, including spoken and written keywords, gesture and body language, hand drawings, and sophisticated pictographs designed to support conversation on complex topics.

At the centre of SCA™ is someone committed to enabling conversation with those who have communication barriers like Aphasia. Through SCA™, people with Aphasia and their conversation partners — be they doctors, nurses, therapists, spouses, or friends — are once more able to communicate effectively and engage in life’s conversations.

Acknowledging Competence and Revealing Competence constitute the framework at the heart of Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia (SCA™)

Acknowledging competence refers to techniques that show adults with Aphasia that you know they are inherently competent. To acknowledge competence:

Indirectly	Directly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interact directly with the patient/client. • Use a natural tone of voice that is not patronizing • Choose topics that are suitably complex and individualized • When communication breaks down, despite your best efforts, acknowledge the difficulty and frustration that you both feel. This facilitates repair of miscommunications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let your patient/client know that you know they have retained more cognitive and social skills than may be immediately apparent. • Use a phrase such as “<i>I know you know what you want to say</i>”, when appropriate • If it’s necessary to speak to someone else to get specific information, explain the need and ask permission.

Revealing competence refers to techniques that facilitate the exchange of information, opinions and feelings between you, the health care professional, and the individual with Aphasia. There are three main functions to help reveal competence – IN, OUT, and VERIFY.

IN: Ensure that the person with aphasia understands the message

Since individuals with Aphasia may have difficulty understanding what others say, techniques and tools to help get our information or our message ‘IN’ to the person with Aphasia can be beneficial. When a person with aphasia does not understand the message, it is not primarily the concepts that cannot be understood; rather, our delivery is at fault. We need to modify how we communicate, so that the person with Aphasia can understand us. We call this getting your message ‘IN’. An example of an ‘IN’ technique would be to combine your talk with meaningful gestures to help the adult with Aphasia to understand what you are saying. (Caution: Even people with mild aphasia can experience difficulty in understanding spoken language and need help to get the conversation back on track.)

OUT: Ensure that the person with aphasia’s message is understood by others

Individuals with Aphasia may also have difficulty expressing themselves or ‘getting their message ‘OUT’. There are techniques and tools you can use to help the person to communicate his or her thoughts. An example of an ‘OUT’ technique would be to give written choices so the pointing to the picture of his/her choice.

VERIFY: Double check that all messages are accurately conveyed

Finally, by making sure you ‘VERIFY’ the message, you are checking to make sure that you have understood the person with Aphasia’s message correctly and that they have understood you, especially is the information is critical. By stating what you believe the person with Aphasia has told you, and checking to see if they agree, you can avoid potential miscommunications and consequently communicate in a more time.

SCA Foundations

There are three strategies that underlie all good interactions.

1. Avoid Distractions

Reducing background noise and visual distractions is essential in order to have a productive conversation with someone who has aphasia or any communication challenge. Whenever possible, make sure to close doors and position the patient/client facing away from areas with busy action.

2. Allow Time to Respond

Allow the person with aphasia extra time to respond, as they may need more time to find a way to convey information or ask a question. You will need to become comfortable with some silence. Your silence is a powerful way to show the person that you want to hear what they have to say.

3. Become a Keen Observer

The person's posture and facial expression will provide clues about whether they understand, have something to say, or are becoming frustrated. If you watch carefully, it will help you decide whether you need to repeat, provide more information provide different information or whether you need to try another way to communicate.

Revealing Competence

1. Adapt the Way You Talk (IN)

- Use a 'slow-normal' rate
- Use short-simple sentences

2. Use Communication Tools, as you are talking naturally, simultaneously add visuals (IN)

Additional visual information can improve understanding

- **Gestures**
- **Written key words**
- **Drawing**
- **Pictographic illustrations**

3. Know How to Ask Questions (OUT)

- Start with an open-ended question, but if the person with aphasia is having difficulty answering, switch to a yes/no question or a question that can be answered by pointing to one from a few options (key words, drawings, pictographic illustrations)
- Use a card with yes/no/? to encourage pointing responses
- Start with broader questions and then narrow questions once you are on the right track

Materials needed to use SCA™ techniques

- Thick black marker
- Blank white paper
- Pencil

Please visit the Aphasia Institute website for more information: www.aphasia.ca

FREE: Introduction to SCA™ eLearning Module

An overview of the basic concepts of SCA™. Participants will develop an understanding of aphasia and how it affects communication and learn techniques to decrease language barriers and improve access to healthcare for individuals with aphasia.

Course Title: **Introduction to SCA eLearning Module**

Course Code: **A1**

This webinar is offered for 0.1 ASHA CEUs (Introductory level; Professional area)

<https://www.aphasia.ca/health-care-providers/education-training/online-options/>

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Supplementary Reference List

**Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia (SCA™):
A Focus on Increasing Communicative Access to Healthcare Services****Elyse Shumway, Rochelle Cohen-Schneider & Aura Kagan**

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