

# FOCUSED

A strategy for successful communication with adults with TBI  
[although it applies to adults and children with any kind of cognitive challenge]

## Face to face

Give your partner your undivided attention. Reduce background distractions like TV noise, or move to a space where you both can hear and see each other.

## Orient

Orienting the person to the topic of conversation can help them remember and organize what they say. Instead of, “How did it go this week?”, try, “Let’s talk about how your partner’s supervised custody visit went this week. Last week said you were concerned about...”

## Choose a time and place

Important conversations are best when you’re not both tired, stressed, or in a rush.

## Use writing!

Written notes help all of us remember important information. Instead of expecting the person with TBI to remember what you say, write it down! That includes nametags – names are the most difficult information for all of us to remember, and having nametags with large, clear print can reduce social stress for everyone.

## Say what you think, say what you feel

Some people with TBI have trouble reading others’ facial expressions and picking up on social cues. Instead of saying “You’re 30 minutes late” and expecting the other person to detect from your tone of voice and facial expression that lateness is a problem, be direct: “You’re 30 minutes late. That is a problem because the person we were going to meet with has left and they can’t meet with us again for another month.” Then problem-solve a strategy for getting the person to their appointments on time!

## Exchange

Communication is about exchanging information. When that exchange breaks down because one of the partners doesn't understand the other, stop and re-start. It’s awkward to admit we

don't understand what someone else says, but better to say, "I'm not following you, could you tell me that again?" than to get the wrong information.

## Don't ask, just tell!

Many people with brain injury have memory problems. Quizzing and testing their memory, or asking them to try harder to remember, does not help. Instead of asking, "What did you do this morning from your to-do list?", try, "This morning you started tasks from your to-do list. Let's have a look at the list and see what's left for this afternoon."

Acronym adapted from: Ripich DN, Zioli E, Fritsch T, Durand EJ. Training Alzheimer's disease caregivers for successful communication. *Clinical Gerontologist*. 1999;21(1):37-56.