

# Carer guide: When speech gets harder

When speech changes with MND, you play a big role in making conversations easier, calmer, and less tiring. Preparing and making small changes can help the person living with MND feel more confident and make communication work better. These strategies can help you to support speech:



## Give time and space

- Allow the person to finish their message without rushing or interrupting.
- Wait patiently — silence is OK.
- Don't pretend to understand if you don't.



## Manage low energy

- Plan important talks for the time of day they have the most energy.
- Keep conversations short and simple when they are tired.
- Offer breaks if they look worn out.



## Support good breathing and posture

- Help them sit upright with relaxed shoulders.
- Reduce heavy pillows or slouching that makes breathing harder.
- Remind them to take a deep breath before speaking.
- Ask their speech pathologist or physiotherapist about diaphragmatic breathing or breath stacking if it has been recommended.



## Make the environment easier

- Turn off background noise (TV, radio, fans).
- Face them directly and make sure there is good lighting.
- Sit close enough to hear clearly.

As a carer, you don't have to get it perfect — just stay present. With patience, teamwork, and guidance from a speech pathologist and others, communication can stay clear, supported, and connected.

## Respect and dignity

- Let the person decide when to use speech and when to switch to another method.
- Only correct or finish their sentences if they ask you to.
- Don't speak for them or assume you know what they mean. Even if it takes extra time, wait for their words or use the backup system they prefer.

# Repairing conversation breakdowns

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**1 Notice it and name it**  
Say: "I'm not getting it yet. Let's slow down and try another way."
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**2 Confirm the topic first**  
Ask: "Are we talking about [food / comfort / visitor / pain / bathroom]?"  
Use a topic list or photo/category page.
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**3 Try a different approach**  
Offer another way, such as: Yes/No questions; Pointing or gestures; Alphabet/picture board; Writing/type, or a speech generating device.
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**4 Confirm each part**  
Break the message into small 'chunks' and repeat back what you think they mean, e.g. "First part is 'pain', yes?" "Next, 'shoulder', yes?"
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**5 Stay calm and supportive**  
Name the effort: "This is hard work — we're a team." This protects connection and lowers frustration.
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**6 Use back-ups**  
If it's still stuck, move up to the next option in the communication system you've planned (low-tech → mid-tech → high-tech).
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**7 Close the loop**  
Say the full message back ("You want the blue blanket now — right?"). Only act when the person clearly agrees.

## About this guide

This guide is designed to be used **when speech gets harder**. It is part of the *speech and communication in MND* series of guides and practical tools. This series was developed with MND Queensland, people living with MND, and their carers to help prepare for and adjust to speech changes, get support, and stay connected.

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