

## Helpers for online assessment

This guidance describes how helpers can be used to support people living with aphasia to get online and participate in online sessions.

### Key messages:

- Confidence in using technology may be low, particularly for people with post-stroke aphasia. Encouragement and support can help but always check in with how motivated the service user is to try.
- Helpers may be supportive in online sessions. They can be family members, carers, friends, assistants, or volunteers. Some helpers will need training to be able to support your service user.
- It is possible to help someone get online who lives alone.
- It is important to negotiate with the service user and helper what support will be offered during the assessment.

### Who are helpers?

Everyone has varying levels of technology skills and confidence. Some people living with aphasia reported reduced confidence using technology after their stroke (Menger, Morris & Salis, 2020). Helpers can support people through the processes needed to get online for your sessions. The key attributes of a helper are **patience**, **supportive**, and **being available** to the service user either at the time of the online meeting, or before for tech set-up and practise. It is ideal if they have knowledge or experience of the technology, including video-conferencing platform, but this is not a deal-breaker – they just need to be willing to learn and support as best they can.

### Helpers can be:

- family members
- friends
- familiar care staff
- rehabilitation/therapy assistants
- volunteers

### When is a helper useful?

- ✓ If the service user has difficulty using their phone/tablet/computer

- ✓ If the service user has no interest in learning new skills for getting onto online sessions
- ✓ If the service user experiences significant fatigue (such that getting online would cause mental exhaustion prior to session starting)
- ✓ If the service user needs to use a device they are unfamiliar with
- ✓ If the service user has difficulties problem solving technology challenges
- ✓ Available to support the service user

### **Ways helpers can support:**

- Providing a suitable device to use
- Setting up the online meeting
- Practising with the service user how to get online and be ready for sessions
- Emotional support for the service user
- Tell the clinician what the service user is pointing on the screen (or gesturing to if off screen)

### **Negotiating roles**

Being clear with your service user and support person about each other's role is important to ensure the support is helpful. For example, the support person could help with setting up the meeting only then leaving.

If the helper is present for the assessment session, early and sensitive conversations can be helpful. Negotiating with the person how they respond independently is important to improve the trustworthiness of the assessment response. Ask the helper to sit back and support only if there is a technology issue or a communication breakdown occurs. If needed, the helper could describe which response the service user is pointing to.

Ask the helper if they are comfortable with being directed by you can help set boundaries and ensure the assessment is administered as instructed by the manual. This may allow for the helper to repeat a question or rephrase, but this should be led by the clinician. Reminding the helper at the start of the session (before assessment) of the agreed support is recommended.

### **No access to a helper**

If a helper is not available:

- Have an in-person session prior to the online session to support them with the technology and set up their space (e.g., position their devices) Have a phone call to talk about the steps with the service user before the session
- Providing more opportunities to practice joining online meetings and navigating the videoconferencing platform
- Send instructions in aphasia friendly formats by email or in the post

A referral to [AbilityNet](#) for direct volunteer support to help get set up online may be useful. Always get your service users consent before doing this.

## References

Menger, F., Morris, J., Salis, C. (2020) The impact of aphasia on Internet and technology use. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 42(21), pp.2986-2996.