

## Alcohol related brain impairment - communication

Alcohol related brain impairment (ARBI) is associated with a change in thinking and memory abilities. It affects the way people learn and understand new information and how they communicate with others. You can help people with ARBI improve their communication skills by keeping the discussion focused and checking that they have understood what has been discussed.

### Keeping the conversation focused

People with ARBI often have difficulty with focusing on a topic of conversation. They can be easily distracted by less relevant points of discussion and wander off in other directions. You can get them back on track by:

- Reminding them of the conversation topic
- Redirecting the conversation by repeating a question
- Using a pencil and paper to focus discussion.

### Communicating effectively

Keep the following points in mind when giving instructions or information:

- Use concrete and familiar terms
- Break down information into small important points
- Slow down when you talk
- Focus discussion on one topic at a time.

Beware of assuming people with ARBI are understanding and remembering what is being discussed. Some people may nod their head and say they understand when in reality they don't. It is a good idea to check their understanding and retention of information by asking the person to repeat what you said in their own words.

### Dealing with memory and retrieval problems

Many people with memory problems related to ARBI respond best to closed questions rather than open-ended questions. That is, it is easier to respond to questions where they can provide a 'yes' or 'no' answer. For example, instead of asking 'What did you do today?', ask 'Did you go out today?' Communication can also be improved by providing cues or prompts to trigger memory.

### Consider how you appear to the person

When you are trying to communicate clearly and get a message across, it is important to consider how you appear to that person. The person with ARBI needs to feel comfortable with you and feel that you understand their needs and frustrations. You should aim to be non-threatening and non-judgmental.

### Where to get help

- **arbias** – specialist services for people with alcohol and substance related brain impairment  
Tel. (03) 8388 1222
- Your regional Department of Human Services office

- Family Drug Help – for information and support for people concerned about a relative or friend using drugs Tel. 1300 660 068

## Things to remember

- Keep conversations focused and on track.
- Give prompts or cues to trigger memory.
- Check understanding of information by asking the person to repeat what you said in their own words.
- Be non-threatening and non-judgmental.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

ARBIAS

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