

Addressing Communication Challenges

Parkinson's disease can impact communication in many ways.

Most people with Parkinson's experience a soft voice volume and may be difficult to hear. Loss of automatic facial expression can be misinterpreted as boredom, anger or sadness. Mood changes in Parkinson's such as apathy, depression or anxiety can also affect communication. The following tips can make communication easier.

- » **Try to have conversations one-on-one or in small groups.** Smaller groups will be more willing to pause the conversation and wait for a comment than a large group.
- » **Reduce or remove distractions** like TV, radio or music when speaking to the person with Parkinson's.
- » **Be close to each other when you talk** so it is easier to hear. Avoid yelling from another room in the house!
- » **Encourage the person with Parkinson's to take a deep breath** before beginning to speak to enhance his or her vocal loudness.
- » **Give the person with Parkinson's time to respond or participate in conversation.** Just like slowness in movement, thought processes can be slowed by Parkinson's disease.
- » **Do not make assumptions about how your loved one is feeling based on facial expression.** Remember, you can't judge a book by its cover!
- » **Recognize that mood changes such as depression, anxiety and apathy can be symptoms of Parkinson's disease.** If you notice these symptoms in your loved one, speak to his or her physician.
- » **Seek a referral to a speech pathologist** who is certified in the Lee Silverman Voice Treatment therapy (visit www.lsvtglobal.com) or who has attended a Parkinson's Foundation Allied Team Training for Parkinson's program.