

Strategies for stressful communication situations

Apply what you know about attention, memory, pacing, active listening, word-finding to make the communication task easier

This uses an interview as an example but can be adjusted for conversations with lawyers & insurers; presentations; tense family discussions

Before the conversation:

- make the information **familiar** (get comfortable with important information about a company, the names of your interviewers)
- use **learning strategies** to do your prep: multiple **short sessions**, repetition, self-testing
- think of likely questions and practice your answers (to save your energy for the unexpected questions) – again, keep rehearsals short
- **lower the consequences** (practice by yourself, to the cat, with a friend, for a volunteer position, for a job you don't want)
- in everyday life **practice** your active listening responses: Hmm, tell me more, Could you give me an example, paraphrasing, confirming

Manage the environment and schedule

- request the time of day you're at your best (if possible)
- buffer with lots of down time
- eliminate distractions – internal (headache, the judgey voice in your head) and external (the dog, the open window)
- pull out all your best self-care tools - mindfulness, breathing, positive self-talk

During the conversation

- **slow** the information down (ask directly or manage indirectly - use active listening/social skills to get repetition, confirm, write it down)
- it's ok to **speak slowly** and deliberately, and to take a thoughtful pause
- give yourself time. If you get sidetracked or flustered, acknowledge and start over "Hmm, let me stop and regroup for a moment"
- keep important **info in view** to reduce the memory load (names, terms)
- ask for a moment to **write down key points** from the question
- ask to have **questions in the chat on Zoom** (you can say you want to make sure there's no issue if the internet cuts out)
- if you find something confusing it might be a badly worded question!