

CLINICAL SIDEBAR 8-3

When helping patients to relearn words and their meanings, it is clinically desirable to emphasize words that are relevant and important to the patient. The goal is to start with words such as the names of body parts, clothing, work tools, family members, and so forth, and gradually expand to less egocentric words. Why do clinicians concentrate on words that are personally relevant to the patient? Why not work on infrequently used and unusual words?

Julie takes her place at Ben's side. With both of them standing before the minister, Ben recalls recent instances when his word-finding problems had made him the butt of jokes. He fears he may again say something ridiculous, embarrassing his bride, ruining the ceremony, and preventing the wedding. He carefully rehearses the two important words: "I do."

Ben admits to himself that the errors at which his friends laughed were indeed funny and seemed to happen when he was excited. Recently, when his golden retriever, Fluffer, had five puppies, Ben announced their birth: "Fluffer had fluffies." Last week, when running to catch an elevator, he had asked the rider to "Hold the alligator," again bringing laughter to his friends and a puzzled look to the rider's face. And when he announced that Julie was considering being a stay-at-home "wifehouse," at first he couldn't understand his best friend's laughter. Only when the correct word order was supplied did Ben see the error of his speech.

Anxiety builds as Ben continues to rehearse the words soon to be required of him. Finally, Julie and Ben face the minister. His best man, who had found so much humor in his misnaming of an elevator, provides the ring. Julie takes her vows, and then the minister looks at Ben. The time has come, and Ben hopes he will avoid a stupid verbal mistake. He then utters the two important words, "I do," with accuracy and precision, and the ceremony ends. Ben and Julie are now wed, and once again, Ben has won his ongoing battle over the traumatic brain injury he suffered 3 years ago.

Case Study 8-4: Closed Head Injury After a Motor Vehicle Accident

Lane

High school is a time of testing boundaries and learning limits, but sometimes there are dire consequences. For Lane, a night of car racing ended in the death of his best friend and his own confinement to a nursing home.

Lane, a high school senior, put every penny he earned into his restored 1967 Camaro Super Sport. What a great car! It was a quarter-mile racing marvel, a machine few drivers dared challenge. Restoring it was Lane's calling in life, and everyone in his high school admired his skill and bravery during the late-night races on the outskirts of the city. The Camaro was Lane's identity. Tragically, the crash that cost him his future and his best friend's life was caused by a blown front tire. The car flipped end over end, throwing Lane and his friend to the pavement. Death and permanent disability were the only spoils of that late-night race.

A person in his early 20s is out of place in a nursing home, but after months of rehabilitation, the doctors had decided that Lane had a poor prognosis for independent living. The nursing home was the only alternative. The car crash had damaged several surface areas of Lane's brain and compressed his brainstem. It had taken months for him to become even partially responsive to his inner needs and the environment. At first, he was agitated and needed to be restrained by a vest with straps securing him to his bed. Once he had broken loose from the restraints and tumbled to the floor, causing bruises and a bloody nose. Periodically, the restraints were removed, and Lane sat up in a specially designed chair and participated in therapies. He was slowly improving,