

Creating Your Intensive Therapy Schedule Back Home



Mimi Block
Holly Craig

After enrollment in a formal aphasia therapy program, gains in communication skills can be maintained and strengthened through regular practice. Based on the University of Michigan Aphasia Program's (UMAP) commitment to *Intensive Scheduling*, we strongly recommend that families try to create opportunities for on-going language stimulation in their home communities. This paper has been compiled from the reports of former clients who have had successful experiences organizing intensive language stimulation opportunities for their loved one with aphasia.

First we outline some basic principles for consideration in developing your home-based intensive schedule. Then we suggest some types of resources you may want to explore in your own community, and offer tips for communication partners.

We welcome your feedback. And if you have other recommendations, please contact us so that we can continue to grow this resource list! (meblock@umich.edu) *Thank you!*

Basic Principles

- language stimulation includes any focused attempt to engage your loved one with aphasia in meaningful exchanges of information. This may include listening as well as expressing oneself (using speaking, gestures, a communication notebook, etc.)
- language stimulation can be combined with formal therapy. For example, your loved one with aphasia may receive one hour of speech therapy a week with a speech-language pathologist at your local hospital or speech clinic, and another 8 or 9 hours of opportunities to communicate which as the caregiver, you have organized yourself
- research shows that 9 or more hours a week of language stimulation is more beneficial than a small number of hours like 2 or 3
- clients will continue to need ongoing practice with their communication for many years
- the person providing the language stimulation opportunities can include a variety of caring and well-motivated individuals, such as family members, friends, volunteers, paid persons from the "helping" fields

We say more about each of these principles below.

Resources

Structured Speech Therapy Options:

As much individual and group therapy as you can obtain is highly recommended for all persons with aphasia. Under the direction of a speech-language clinician your family member with aphasia can target specific therapy goals. For clients returning home from UMAP, these goals will be provided to the family at the end of enrollment in our program. A community-based speech-language clinician can guide you and your loved one with aphasia in finding affordable options in the community that will facilitate successful communication in real life. Hospitals, private practices and university speech

programs offer ongoing speech-language therapy. Your primary care physician can help you locate therapy programs in your community. In addition, the website for the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association is an invaluable resource for finding skilled clinicians in your area (www.asha.org) Click **The Public** tab at the top of the page, and select **Find a Professional** from the drop down menu.

University training clinics are affordable, since the therapy is provided by graduate students in the field of Speech-Language Pathology.

Language Groups/Support Groups:

These groups offer safe havens for individuals with aphasia to communicate with each other. They can share their concerns, hopes and fears with the support from one another. These groups are sometimes directed by a speech-language pathologist. However individuals with aphasia can also be effective leaders and positive role models for the other participants.

If no group is available in your community, consider forming your own group. It is challenging to form your own support group, so contact a local hospital's speech and language department to give you some guidance.

Book Clubs:

These clubs help people with aphasia to reconnect with reading for pleasure, improve their communication and offer a positive environment for socialization.

If no club is available in your community, consider forming your own club. It is best to contact a local library, university or speech therapy program to assist you to develop a book club for individuals with aphasia. Librarians can help you select appropriate books and may provide a location to hold a weekly club.

Recreational Therapy:

Therapeutic recreation helps individuals with aphasia resume leisure and social activities. It is important for your family member with aphasia to re-enter the community and strengthen their communication and social skills.

Exploring Social Activities:

Individuals with aphasia need to be encouraged to participate in past leisure activities and explore new ones. Dinner clubs, museum outings, sporting events, cooking, crafts, and physical activities have been successful ways that our UMAP clients have re-entered the community.

Scheduling a Volunteer:

Volunteers are people with aphasia or individuals from all walks of life who can support and enhance communication skills. Volunteers can assist with homework, interact in small groups as well as participate in recreational activities. Volunteers are often unfamiliar listeners that help facilitate people with aphasia to achieve successful speech interactions. People with aphasia can benefit from being a volunteer or working with one.

Hiring a Paid Communication Partner:

Many skilled individuals would welcome a modestly paid position as a communication partner for a few hours each week. You may need to advertise in your local paper, or post a brief announcement at local churches, synagogues, senior centers, colleges and high schools, or community centers. Consider some of the types of individuals listed below.

- retired professionals from the helping professions (nursing, teaching, social work, etc.)
- high school students looking for some after school or weekend experiences that will help them prepare for college
- a mom or dad who is a primary caregiver for school-aged children and has some time during the day for another activity

Computer Technology:

Language software, internet and e-mail are excellent tools that provide ongoing language stimulation to adults with aphasia. It enhances their communication, reading, writing and listening skills. It increases their self confidence in performing tasks independently. It also provides ongoing reinforcement.

Tips for Communication Partners

- find out as much as you can about the speech and language strengths and limitations of the person with aphasia. Can the person understand short phrases, whole sentences, longer conversations? Can the person with aphasia speak; need to write and speak together; use a communication device, etc?
- plan conversations in advance, considering the length of the conversation to avoid fatigue, topics of interest to the person with aphasia, and whether visual aids will be needed (a photograph album to talk about grandchildren; a menu to prepare for a trip to a local restaurant with friends, etc.)
- encourage your loved one with aphasia to use compensatory strategies (such as a picture dictionary or writing to improve the effectiveness of his message
- praise your loved one with aphasia when the message was conveyed successfully

We hope that this gives you some new ideas to help your loved ones with aphasia reach their goals and reenter the community!

Resources:

- University of Michigan Aphasia Program
www.aphasiahelp.com
- National Aphasia Association
www.aphasia.org
- American Speech/Language Association
www.ASHA.org
- American Heart Association
www.americanheart.org
- American Stroke Association(group locator)
www.strokeassociation.org
- Aphasia Hope Foundation
www.strokesos.com
- www.aphasiahope.org
- Brain Injury Association
www.biausa.org
- www.strokesurvivor.com (Caregivers & Stroke Survivors)
- National Family Caregivers Association
www.nfcacares.org
- The Well Spouse Foundation
www.wellspouse.org
- UCLL
www.aphasia.org (“People Helping People” icon)
- The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped
www.loc.gov/nls
- Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic
www.rfbd.org
- Bookshare
www.bookshare.org
- Readplease Corporation
www.readplease.com
- Lighthouse International
www.lighthouse.org
- Aphasia Center of California (The Book Connection)
www.aphasiacenter.org
- American Therapeutic Recreation Association
www.atra-tr.org
- National Therapeutic Recreation Society

- <http://www.nrpa.org>
- Recreational Therapy
www.recreationaltherapy.com
- Teach Leisure
www.teachleisure.com
- Activity Connection
www.activityconnection.com
- Volunteer Match
www.volunteermatch.org
- Network for Good
www.networkforgood.org
- Kagen,A., Gailey,l G.F. (1993). Functional is not enough: Training conversation partners for aphasic adults. In A. L. Holland and M. M. Forbes (Eds.), *Aphasia treatment world perscpectives* (pp. 199-225). San Diego:Singular Publishing Group.
- Vickers,C.(1999). Some dos and don'ts for volunteers. In J. Lyon, C. Vickers, & G. Wallace (presenters), *Continuum of cre for aphasia: Long-term management phase*, ASHA telephone seminar & self-study program.