



Home Resources For Communication Impairments

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A stroke can weaken a survivor's communication system, and speech-language therapy is often a component of the individual's rehabilitation program. The primary purpose of speech-language treatment is to strengthen the residual communication skills or to facilitate a system for communication to occur. As a general rule, the most recovery of communication skills occurs within the first six months following a stroke. There are times when therapy programs are extended beyond the six-month time frame, frequently due to significant progress in the treatment program and a strong prognosis for communication recovery as determined by the speech-language pathologist. The length of treatment depends on several variables:

- Progress in communication skills.
- The motivation level of the individual receiving the services.
- Medical conditions which may interfere with participation in therapy.
- Third-party reimbursement for the therapy services provided.

The speech-language pathologist, in consultation with the client and family members, takes these variables into consideration when it's time to stop the

treatment program. At other times, it becomes necessary to discontinue a treatment program because of insurance coverage limitations. Whatever that case, the conclusion of a speech-language therapy program is often a concern for the stroke survivor and the family.

Home programs are frequently developed by speech-language pathologists and given to their clients prior to discharge. These programs provide the family members with materials and various techniques to assist the stroke survivor in maintaining the level of communication skills acquired during treatment. If a home program was not provided for the stroke survivor, it would be appropriate for family members to request that one be developed. It is also important that the home program be updated on a regular basis, and any changes in the survivor's communication skills be reported to the speech-language pathologist.

There are many activities which can be done at home to facilitate communication interaction. These activities may be appropriate at the termination of a survivor's therapy, if the survivor had none at all, or if it has been several years since his last therapy. The following list contains a few ideas to help get started in developing activities unique to the communication situation. This is a guide. It is beneficial to plan a certain time or times to do

communication tasks. Time slots are most successful if they are kept short (less than 30 minutes) and planned when the survivor is well-rested. If the survivor is frustrated with the

tasks, it is best to either stop for the day or change activities. These activities are most helpful when done with a family member or friend.

Activity Guide:

1. Encourage the survivor to use gestures to denote common action words (eating, drinking, writing, sleeping, reading, thinking, driving, listening, shopping, cutting, etc.)
2. Assemble a box of common household objects. Have the survivor point to the object you name ("Point to the spoon.") or point to the object you describe ("Point to the one you clean your teeth with.") Have the survivor follow simple directions using the objects ("Turn the cup over.")
3. Have the survivor draw pictures of common objects (cup, spoon, bed, pillow).
4. Cut headlines and pictures with captions out of newspapers. These are easier to read than an entire newspaper.
5. Print the names of common household objects and rooms on 3" x 5" index cards. Ask the survivor to read the cards (silently or aloud) and then locate the item (table, chair, bathroom, kitchen, garage).
6. Cut out magazine pictures and ask the survivor to name the objects in the pictures or tell a story about each picture.
7. Use simple word search puzzle books.
8. Play card games such as "21" and "War" to practice numbers.
9. Make a chart of daily chores around the house with actual photographs of the survivor doing the listed chores.
10. Adapt a favorite, simple recipe using pictures and/or drawings for the ingredients and measurements.
11. Take pictures of family members, friends and places frequently visited by the survivor. Put these pictures in a book and encourage the survivor to talk about the pictures.
12. Use small maps of the state you live in, the United States, and the world. Put these maps in the above picture book (from 11) and refer to the maps when talking about various locations.
13. Have the survivor practice writing activities daily such as copying shapes, letters or words. Encourage the survivor to write words from dictation, short letters or thank you notes.
14. Keep a large monthly calendar in view and write birthdays and anniversaries in red ink. Keep all appointments and events on the calendar. Consider writing an item of interest for each day.
15. Assist the survivor in keeping a journal that requires a daily entry. It could be something written or drawn, a magazine or newspaper article, a picture, a photograph, a party invitation, a piece of cloth - anything that has meaning to the person.

16. Go to the library and check out travel books with large, beautiful pictures and few words. Encourage the survivor to talk about them.
17. Enroll in enrichment classes such as painting, pottery, photography, ceramics or golf. Encourage interaction with others in a stimulating environment outside of the home.
18. Limit TV watching and encourage interaction with other people. This promotes the necessity to communicate expressively, using speech, gestures, drawing, writing, picture-word books, and other augmentative communication systems.
19. Provide commercially-prepared speech-language workbooks. (*See home resources at end of article.*)

If the reader requires additional ideas or has questions about the ones listed above, contact a speech-language pathologist at your local hospital or rehabilitation center.

The overall goal is communication and interaction between the stroke survivor and other family members and friends. Communication success is a rewarding experience and helps to rebuild and maintain the stroke survivor's level of self-esteem.

Home resources:

Workbooks for Language and Speech Disorders, Kathryn M. Kilpatrick, Visiting Nurse Services, Inc., 1200 McArthur Drive, Akron, Ohio 44320 or call (216) 745-1601.

Speech & Language Rehabilitation Workbook, Volumes I and II, Robert L. Keith, MS, Pro-Ed, 8700 Shoal Creek Blvd., Austin, TX 78757-6897 or call (512) 451-3246.