

Caring for the Caregiver

We believe that caring for the caregiver is equally as important as caring for our clients with Aphasia. We can't expect our caregivers to provide the level of support that is necessary in helping our patients with Aphasia regain their emotional, physical, social, and communicative well beings if they're not taken care of. As Speech Language Pathologists, we often wonder how we can be doing more to care for the caregiver. Our primary role is to provide education to caregivers about Aphasia---but is that enough?

Find a support group: Several of our caregivers are involved in caregiver support groups. Support groups can be a way for caregivers to "unload" with people who understand it best. Caregivers may also be able to provide insights into strategies or adaptations that have worked for them or their loved ones. Support groups allow you to know that you are not alone and that it is okay to feel the way they feel, whether it's overwhelmed, calm, terrified, angry, excited, or thankful. Taking on the role as a caregiver of a person with Aphasia is often unexpected and can be quite a roller coaster of emotions. Everyone's journey is different, so finding support amongst the similarity of challenges may be comforting.

Take some "me" time: In some cases, being a caregiver can be all consuming, but don't forget to put on your own oxygen mask first. Take care of yourself in order to be able to take care of your loved one. Every caregiver needs and deserves time to themselves. This may look different to everyone. Self-care can range from an uninterrupted shower, to a workout class, to a week away. You have the right to recharge, without

feeling guilty taking time for yourself, so that you can continue to care for your loved one. Some caregivers may find this unmanageable, which brings us to our next point.

It's ok to ask for help: Caregivers can't be in two places at once. It is important to rely on family, neighbors, and friends to provide relief. It's also okay to tell them exactly what you need. Try to be explicit with how someone can help. Tell them you would like a few meals for the week, or you just need some company, or ask them to take over for a few hours so you can go for a walk or do the grocery shopping. You will find that people want to help, they just do not know how or aren't sure how to ask.

Finding a balance: It can be challenging to find a balance between being a caregiver while also being a supportive spouse, parent, or child. It is important to establish boundaries between being a caregiver and being a family member. While some people with Aphasia don't mind working with their caregiver on therapy tasks, others may prefer that they do not take on the role of a therapist. They want to maintain that role as a wife, or a mother, or as a son, or a father...and that is okay.

Know your resources: The healthcare system can be an extremely overwhelming system to navigate and work through, especially when trying to also cope with a life altering event. Several resources are accessible to caregivers. Resources range from educational materials, caregiver activities and online support groups. Be sure to check out our resources section for some of our favorite caregiver resources.



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