

Group-based speech therapy for aphasia in the acute stage of recovery

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Objectives

At the end of this presentation, learners will be able to:

1. Identify key patient characteristics that determine appropriateness for inclusion in group therapy during the acute stage of recovery.
2. Describe a group therapy framework that incorporates principles of neuroplasticity (Kleim and Jones, 2008).
3. Explain the impact of group therapy on communication, social connectedness, and life participation during the acute stage of recovery.

Selected literature on group therapy

- Wertz, R.T., Collins, M.J., Weiss, D., et al. (1981). Veterans Administration cooperative study on aphasia: A comparison of individual and group treatment. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research*, 24(4), 580-594.
 - Five VA hospitals randomly enrolled patients with aphasia in traditional individual or a group setting beginning at 1 month post-onset and going to 48 months post onset. Both treatment schedules were high intensity (i.e., 8 hours per week). They found minimal differences in language outcome measures between the participants in each treatment milieu.
- Elman, R. J. & Bernstein-Ellis, E. (1999a). The efficacy of group communication treatment in adults with chronic aphasia. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, (42), 411-419.
 - In 28 participants with chronic aphasia, group-based therapy, compared to no therapy, led to improved performance on objective communication and language measures.
- Vickers, C. P. (2010). Social networks after the onset of aphasia: The impact of aphasia group attendance. *Aphasiology*, 24(6-8), 902-913.
 - Forty people with aphasia completed interviews/questionnaires regarding their post-stroke social networks. While all participants reported a reduction in social networks and social contact; participants who were enrolled in a weekly aphasia group reported less social isolation.
- Fama, M. E., Baron, C. R., Hatfield, B., & Turkeltaub, P. E. (2016). Group therapy as a social context for aphasia recovery: A pilot, observational study in an acute rehabilitation hospital. *Topics in Stroke Rehabilitation*, 9357(March), 1-8.
 - 10 participants with severe non-fluent aphasia were observed during a single session of 1:1 therapy and group therapy during the natural course of inpatient rehab. During groups, they initiated more communication, for a wider variety of purposes, but used fewer novel words.
- Baron, C., Holcombe, M., & van der Stelt, C. (2018). Providing effective speech-language pathology group treatment in the comprehensive inpatient rehabilitation setting. *Seminars in Speech and Language*, 39(1), 53-65.
 - Overview provided in the individual sections below!

Identifying appropriate candidates for group therapy

- Ensure the patient speaks the shared language
- Ensure the patient's physical abilities are conducive to group participation (e.g., sitting tolerance, vision, hearing)
- Ensure the patient is amenable to the group treatment setting

A suggested framework for a group session

1. Begin with time to build rapport and a comfortable conversation environment (e.g., small talk as group members arrive, introductions)
2. Clear statement of purpose of the group and review of individual goals
3. SLP teaches, demonstrates, and/or reviews strategies to be used during the session
 - Includes expectations for independent strategy use as well as ways in which group members can provide feedback and support to each other
4. SLP facilitates, rather than leads, a conversation or activity
5. Review: SLP and group members give both positive and constructive feedback (self/others)

Our favorite group activities (this is by no means an exhaustive list!)

- Conversation
 - Current events topics
 - “Which would you rather?” cards, Table Topics cards, etc.
- Story retell (pick a common movie, book, or experience)
- Games – really anything involving a communication component
 - 20 Questions
 - Apples to Apples
 - Bowl of Words
- Aphasia/stroke education

Additional readings and resources

- Elman, R.J. & Bernstein-Ellis, E. (1999b). Psychosocial aspects of group communication treatment. *Seminars in Speech and Language*, 20(1), 65-71.
- Elman R.J. (2007). *Group Treatment of Neurogenic Communication Disorders: The Expert Clinician’s Approach* (2nd ed). San Diego: Plural Publishing, Inc.
- Simmons-Mackie, N., Elman, R. J., Holland, A. L., & Damico, J. S. (2007). Management of discourse in group therapy for aphasia. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 27(1), 5-23.
- Simmons-Mackie, N. & Damico, J.S. (2009). Engagement in group therapy for aphasia. *Seminars in Speech and Language*, 30(1), 18-26.
- Kleim, J. A. & Jones, T. A. (2008). Principles of experience-dependent neural plasticity: Implications for rehabilitation after brain damage. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research : JSLHR*, 51(1), S225-39.

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