

It's Not Me, It's You - When You Don't Like Your Speech Therapist

Occasionally it happens: your loved one just isn't happy with the speech therapist he's seeing. Since all of our clients are here for five hours a day, there are five different therapists working with each client. While it's rare, sometimes a client just doesn't like something about one of the therapists. This doesn't necessarily mean that there's something wrong with either your loved one or the therapist, it just means that there's **some expectation that's not being met**.

Sometimes caregivers will relate their therapist "horror stories"—the therapist was too abrupt, impatient, busy answering her phone, always late, didn't know what she was doing, etc. The most frequent complaint is that the therapist made a specific point of stating that their loved ones progress was limited and they were wasting their time. I can definitely see how that would make you unhappy! So, **how important is it that you like your therapist?**

You want your therapist to be the best of both worlds—have great rapport with your loved one, but also be very knowledgeable and skilled. Sometimes this doesn't happen. Sometimes your therapist is very nice, but that's not helping your loved one. Sometimes the therapist is skilled but less interactive. So what can you do about it?

1. Discuss the issue with the therapist. When we have any issues whatsoever at our center, we first try to figure out what happened. It's typically a misunderstanding, and we all learn from it. As a professional, your therapist should be able to use that information to improve their performance, or educate your family about their therapy. If your therapist isn't willing to problem-solve, you may need to move to the next suggestion.

2. Ask to be assigned to another therapist. You may not have any other options for therapists, but you may have a choice of another rehab facility or home health. You may not be the only family who's had an issue with your therapist, and speaking with the supervisor may help you and the therapist by giving feedback.

3. Don't assume the therapist is purposefully being difficult. Many of us were taught that we were the ultimate authority on a range of subjects and that if a family didn't heed our advice, they were only hurting themselves. We weren't really taught about what it's like from the caregiving side. I cringe thinking about some of the things I did as a student, convinced that my way was the best and only way—if you didn't do what I said, then you were wasting all of our time.

4.Nothing. You can just wait for therapy to end. I wouldn't recommend this unless you have no other options and here's why—if a client is having an issue with me or another therapist here, we can feel that there's something off. We don't know quite what the issue is, but we can sense and document 'resistance to treatment', 'shutting down' or 'unwilling to cooperate'. Every once in awhile, a client will subconsciously block their own progress, but it doesn't happen very often. Once we're aware there's something off, it changes the session interactions.

Do you have to like your therapist? No. Does your therapist need to be skilled? Yes. Are both qualities important for progress in aphasia? Absolutely.