

The Cycles of Learning in Aphasia Recovery

“If it doesn’t challenge you, it won’t change you” —Fred DeVito

This quote hangs on the walls at The Aphasia Center, and I like to refer clients to it when they start to feel like that their aphasia recovery is overwhelming.

Aphasia recovery takes a lot of work and no one is motivated 100% of the time. Sometimes we’re tired, stressed out, or just want to relax a bit. There will be times when you or your loved one with aphasia want to give up. Looking at the big picture **can be** overwhelming, especially if you’re focused on seeing big changes.

I always tell my clients at The Aphasia Center that cycles of learning start by them **thinking that what they’re doing is hard**. We start to train each skill here slightly above their current skill level—enough to learn (neuroplasticity) and be mildly challenging. Many of our clients were hesitant to do intensive aphasia therapy because they didn’t like their previous therapy. It was too hard for them. Their therapist drilling an hour of questions they can’t answer is exhausting and frustrating. No one wants to spend one hour being wrong, let alone five hours during intensive therapy. I wouldn’t want to do that, either.

By starting our treatment at a mildly challenging level, we’re giving the help and tools needed to be successful at that task/skill. Then, once that skill has been learned over time, it becomes easier. **Clients are excited because something is easy now!**

But then, suddenly it’s hard again. We’ve changed the training level again to be more challenging. Most clients think that there’s something wrong with them. Then we explain that we’ve made it harder to keep them **moving forward. It’s harder now because they’re getting better and better at it!**

This cycle will continue on and on as they gain momentum towards reaching their goals. They feel successful. And feeling successful leads to better motivation, discipline, and a willingness to try situations that may have been too difficult before. A client may now feel more comfortable going to order their coffee or taking an Uber. Independence!

And it all started out with overcoming a challenging mindset that “this is too hard”.