



Therapy Handbook 6

Functional Conversation



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Therapy Approach 6 – Functional Conversation

Background: EVA Park provides the opportunity for people with aphasia to practice functional conversations that they may find difficult in the real world in a supported virtual space.

This approach draws on the principles of neuroplasticity. Changes to neural networks are more likely to occur with the following conditions:

- Repetition
- Intensity (Raymer et al, 2008)
- Personal relevance
- Use it or lose it!

Generalisation is more likely to occur in complex tasks, e.g. conversations in a multisensory environment such as EVA Park (Raymer et al, 2008; Johansson, 2011).

Therapy: The client will receive daily, supported conversation sessions in EVA Park - interacting in the virtual environment for a 5-week period. The supported conversation sessions may take place with a therapist, speech and language therapy assistant or volunteer trained in supporting conversation.

The role of the therapist (or trained volunteer/speech and language therapy assistant) will involve:

- Getting to know the client and building a rapport with them in EVA Park.
- Coordinating 25 hours of supported conversation sessions. These should take place for 1 hour daily, 5 days a week for 5 weeks.
- Providing support to your client if they need help with the technical aspects of using EVA Park.

You may wish to record of your sessions using the EVA Session Record Form at the end of this document.

Conversation groups may be organised and negotiated with other users.

Setting goals: In the first few sessions, decide with your client what they would like to practise in EVA Park.

For example:

- Talking to a receptionist at the GP surgery / Health Centre.
- Preparing feedback for discussion about a work topic.
- Coping with background noise to have conversation in the pub with friends.

Extending conversations: The aim is for conversations in EVA Park to become more complex as the 5 weeks progress. Consider increasing complexity by:

- Adding background noise.
- Placing barriers in conversation, e.g. in the restaurant saying that you have run out of a requested food.
- Extending previously discussed topics.

Conversation groups: EVA Park provides a space to host conversation groups. These would have to be negotiated and organised with other users of EVA Park. The therapist would take the lead in facilitating a conversation group.

Topics may include:

- Sport
- News
- Gossip
- Music

Supporting communication in EVA Park

Use similar strategies to support communication in EVA Park as you would face-to-face. See below for some extra tips.

Supporting comprehension - getting the message in

- Keep to one idea at a time.
- Ensure one person speaks at a time. This can be awkward at first when you cannot see the other person.
- Use short sentences and simple syntax.
- Use the gestures available in EVA Park to show thinking time, laughter, waving and clapping.
- Your avatar can point to objects in EVA Park by clicking on them.
- Use YES/NO questions.
- Speak more slowly but with normal voice and intonation.
- Negotiate turn-taking: avoid speaking simultaneously.
- Recap - check you both understand.
- Avoid background noise (e.g. turn off background noise options in EVA Park, move away from music or other conversations, encourage client to minimise noise in their own environment).
- Ensure the client can hear you adequately - you may need to adjust microphone and headphone settings.
- Use Instant Messaging (IM) to write down key words.



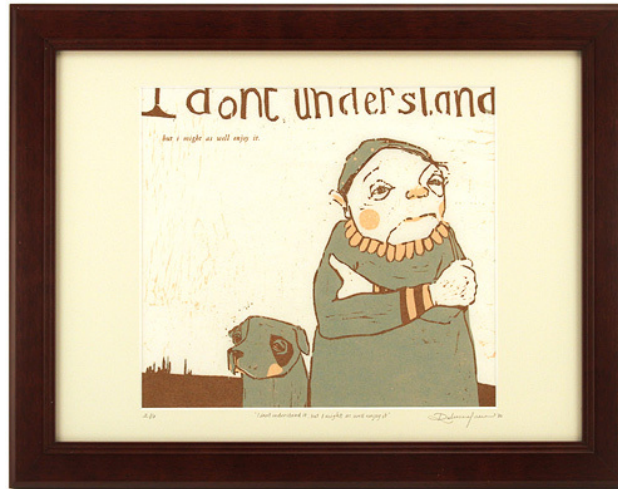
Supporting expression - getting the message out

- Give your conversation partner time.
- Use YES/NO questions.
- Identify the topic then move on to specifics (funnelling).
- Recap - check you both understand.
- Clarify - say back to the person in your own words what you have understood.



- Encourage use of the gestures available in EVA Park to show thinking time, laughter, waving and clapping.

What can I do if we get stuck?



Even the most experienced clinician will experience times when they misunderstand or are not sure what the person with aphasia is communicating to them. Try to stay relaxed and not to put yourself or your conversation partner under too much pressure.

Strategies to help include:

- Being honest. Say when you don't understand or are stuck with a technical issue in EVA Park.
- Accept responsibility and clarify, e.g. "Let's see if I have this right?".
- Use closed yes/no questions to funnel the topic.
- Start at the topic level and work down, e.g. "Are you telling me something about your family? ...Is it about your grandchildren?".
- Use Instant Messaging to write key words.
- Ask what helps - **the person with aphasia is the expert** of what works for them.
- Take a break from the topic and come back to it later on.

Record Keeping: It may be helpful to use the EVA Session Record Form at the end of this document to keep a record of sessions for general observation, reflection and planning. Also, to record any technical issues in order to feedback (anonymously) to the EVA Park Research Team.

EVA Session Record Form

Client:

Date:

Time of session:

Therapist/Assistant/Volunteer:

Session no: __/25

General observations (mood, engagement, fatigue)

Observations of communication and language (including word-finding)

Topics discussed

Supported conversation strategies and effectiveness

Technical issues and resolutions (list of possible resolutions overleaf).

Tick technical issues type (please tick)

Sound

Visual display

Internet connectivity

Log on

Log off

Avatar Movement

Equipment (e.g. microphone, headphones, keypad)

Detail of technical issues and resolution:

Incidences that were unique to a virtual world

Planning for next session (e.g. strategies to try, resources to prepare)

Signature: _____

A list of possible solutions to technical problems:

1. Check the client has their headphones and microphone in the correct sockets?
Are they fully pushed in?
2. Are you wearing headphones?
3. Check: has the client clicked their microphone on?
4. Check: is the client's internet connection on?
5. Check: is the 'Numlock' button on, on the keypad?
6. Suggest: the client logs off and on again.
7. If it is an unresolvable technical problem, please contact a member of the team for further advice.

References / Reading List

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