



APHASIA INCLUSIVE CELEBRATIONS

**INCLUSION DOESN'T HAPPEN BY ACCIDENT
LET'S START WITH THE HOLIDAYS**

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First Edition, 2024
Second Edition, 2025

For
My
Daughters:
You fill my life
with joy and remind me
of the true meaning of family.
This book is dedicated to you, with
love and gratitude for the light you bring
to every
season.

START HERE: SIMPLE TOOLS FOR DAILY INCLUSION

Hosting a celebration after aphasia can feel complicated, especially when guests don't know what to say or how to help. That's why I created the **Aphasia Conversation Pieces**: simple, printable signs you can place around your home or event.

Each piece quietly teaches inclusion:

- What aphasia is and how it affects communication
- How to respond when words get stuck
- How to include your person in conversation and decision-making
- Small actions that build confidence instead of dependence

Set them on a counter, near the food table, beside the tree—anywhere guests will see them. They spark empathy, invite curiosity, and remind everyone that inclusion starts with awareness.



DEAR READER,

If you're holding this book, chances are you love someone whose voice has changed—but whose spirit hasn't. And somewhere along the way, your love turned into protection. You step in before they struggle. You speak when the silence feels heavy. You organize, interpret, anticipate—because that's what love looks like when words are hard.

But here's the hidden truth: protection feels kind, yet it quietly takes their power away. Inclusion gives it back. Inclusion says, "I believe you can."

It looks like slowing down, giving time, writing keywords, offering choices, and doing things with them instead of for them.

I've sat with hundreds of families and survivors, and I've seen it every time. When a partner shifts from guarding to guiding, connection reawakens. Confidence follows. Communication grows stronger than speech alone.

This book is your invitation into that shift. You'll learn small, structured steps to bring your person back into the center of the story—during holidays, birthdays, or any ordinary day worth celebrating.

Welcome to Aphasia-Inclusive Celebrations. You're exactly where you need to be.

Genevieve

WHAT TO EXPECT

This workbook is designed to help you navigate the holidays with greater **ease and confidence** as you support your loved one with aphasia.

Here's what you can expect as you work through the chapters:

- **Understanding:** We'll start by exploring what the holidays mean to you, what traditions matter most, and how your mindset may need to shift to create a more inclusive experience.
- **Practical Strategies:** You'll discover various communication techniques, holiday activity ideas, and practical tools to make holiday gatherings easier.
- **Real-Life Stories:** This workbook features real-life stories of people (names have been changed) with aphasia and dysarthria who have found ways to stay connected during the holidays. **Shirley, Len,** and **Alvin** each experience different types of aphasia, while **Bruce** has dysarthria, which affects the clarity of his speech. Their stories highlight the challenges and the solutions that have helped them—and can help you—create a more inclusive holiday experience.
- **Reflection & Action:** Each chapter contains prompts and activities encouraging you to reflect on your situation and apply your learning.
- **Self-Care:** We'll also address the importance of caring for yourself, recognizing signs of burnout, and finding ways to recharge.



I welcome peace and joy this holiday season.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK FOR REAL-LIFE INCLUSION

This isn't a manual; it's a companion. Each short section offers one idea you can try the same day—grounded in supported-conversation principles and the Life Participation Approach to Aphasia (LPAA).

You'll see:

1. **A Story** – real families facing the same challenges you are.
2. **A Framework** – the evidence-based tool behind the story.
3. **A Simple Action** – one move to practice right away.

Move through the pages in any order. Use what fits your season and your energy. Inclusion isn't a checklist; it's a rhythm.

Pair this book with our YouTube series for demonstrations you can watch and replay anytime.



I choose to focus on what truly matters.

PRE-ASSESSMENT

Before diving into Chapter 1, let's take a moment to assess from where it is you're starting. The goal is to identify your current feelings about the holidays, communication challenges, and caregiving responsibilities.

I understand what matters most during the holidays.



I know my loved one's communication strengths and can use strategies to help.



I feel prepared to adjust holiday traditions and introduce new ideas.



I know how to share communication strategies with others effectively.



I have a clear plan for hosting, traveling, or attending gatherings.



I feel confident about my ability to make self-care a priority.



I feel ready to handle unexpected challenges during the holidays.



We will revisit these questions later to reflect on your progress.



I choose calm, laughter, and love.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	The Holidays in a New Light.....	1
2	Exploring Roles.....	15
3	Your Holiday Vision.....	31
4	Sharing The Plan.....	49
5	Hosting With Ease.....	65
6	Attending + Traveling.....	81
7	Holiday Self-Care.....	100
8	Bringing It All Together.....	114
9	Next Steps.....	128

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

1

The Holidays in a New Light



The holiday season is less about perfection
and more about presence.

CHAPTER 1

The holidays bring a mix of emotions—joy, excitement, stress, and sometimes even a touch of sadness. For many of us, they are a time for celebration and togetherness, but when you're supporting a loved one with aphasia, the experience can feel overwhelming. **Balancing traditions, managing expectations, and adapting to new realities can create a sense of pressure.**

This chapter will help you reflect on one specific holiday to start. By understanding your priorities, mindset, and values, you'll lay a foundation for making the holiday season more meaningful and manageable. Remember, this isn't about doing more; it's about **focusing on what truly matters to you and your family.**



THE HOLIDAYS IN A NEW LIGHT

CHOOSING YOUR HOLIDAY

Holidays come in many forms, and each carries unique traditions, emotions, and pressures. Whether it's Thanksgiving, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Christmas, New Year's, or another special celebration, tackling all of them at once can feel overwhelming.

That's why we're starting small by **focusing on just one holiday**. Doing so allows you to see what's meaningful in order to create a more intentional experience.

For example, I love Thanksgiving because it represents the change in seasons and the chance to gather with friends and family without the pressure of gift-giving. It's about the **joy of preparing and sharing a meal** and creating an atmosphere of warmth and connection.

On the other hand, New Year's Eve is special to me because I love cooking a fancy meal that challenges my cooking skills. It's a time to celebrate the year that's passed and share an intimate moment with close family.

Choose the holiday you'd like to focus on first. It could be the one coming up next, the one that feels most significant, or even the one that's been most challenging. Remember, you can always revisit this workbook for other holidays.

Selected Holiday: _____

EXPLORING WHAT MATTERS

The holidays are often filled with traditions, activities, and people who mean a lot to us. When managing the realities of aphasia, it is essential to focus on what truly brings joy and connection rather than trying to do it all. Reflecting on the elements that make this holiday meaningful will help you gain clarity on where to direct your energy and what to prioritize.

For example, my daughters love Thanksgiving because it's all about being together and the food (I think they love pumpkin pie the most).

We often invite friends, neighbors, and others who don't have family nearby. Thanksgiving is about conversation, connection, and embracing the various people who come together. In contrast, New Year's Eve is more intimate, focusing on reliving the year's high points, expressing gratitude, and spending time with close family.

A client, **Shirley**, blends holidays by decorating their Christmas tree on Thanksgiving day. For them, it marks the transition from one holiday to the next and gives them a head start on the festive spirit. This unique tradition helps her feel more connected to both celebrations.



Reflect on what truly brings joy this season.
Cherishing small, meaningful moments is
the best gift we can give ourselves.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

What are your favorite traditions for this holiday you've chosen to focus on, and why are they meaningful?

Who are the people you most look forward to seeing, and what makes their presence special?

What activities do you enjoy most during this holiday, and why?

THE HOLIDAYS IN A NEW LIGHT

REVISITING MINDSET AND EXPECTATIONS

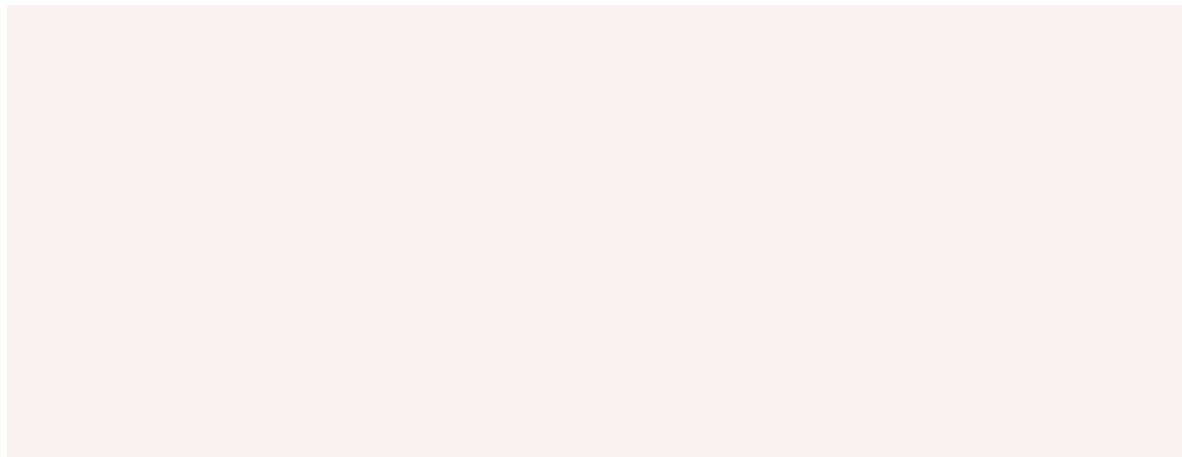
Our expectations can shape how we experience the holidays. Often, we place unnecessary pressure on ourselves to make everything perfect or uphold every tradition. This can lead to stress and even a sense of failure if things don't go as planned. By identifying and challenging these expectations, you can free yourself from the weight of "should" and focus on what truly matters.

Mindset Reflection

List below any common expectations that may be causing stress for this particular holiday. Examples could include:

- "I have to host the family dinner and prepare all the food myself."
- "The house must be perfectly decorated."
- "Everyone needs to attend the celebration at the same time."

Think about which of these expectations feel most burdensome.



CHALLENGING YOUR MINDSET

For each expectation listed, consider an alternative approach that prioritizes **connection over perfection**. This step is about giving yourself permission to let go of the things that don't serve you and your loved one.

Example: Instead of "I need to prepare all the food," try "I'll ask each family member to bring a dish."

Expectation:

Alternative:

Expectation:

Alternative:

Expectation:

Alternative:

Expectation:

Alternative:



THE HOLIDAYS IN A NEW LIGHT

QUICK TIPS FOR MANAGING HOLIDAY EXPECTATIONS

The holiday season can be overwhelming, but you don't have to go through it alone. There are small, practical steps you can take right now to set more realistic expectations and reduce stress. These tips will help you get started, even as you continue working through the workbook.

- **Start Planning Early:** Give yourself plenty of time to prepare so you don't feel rushed. The earlier you start, the more manageable the holiday will feel.
- **Accept Help from Others:** Don't be afraid to delegate tasks and ask family members to contribute. This is a team effort, and it's okay to share the load.
- **Focus on One Key Tradition:** Instead of trying to do it all, pick one tradition that is most important to you and your loved one.
- **Set Boundaries:** It's okay to say "no" to certain activities or events if they feel overwhelming. It's more important to protect your peace.
- **Embrace Flexibility:** Be open to adjusting plans as needed in order to make the holiday enjoyable for everyone.

Note: Try incorporating one or more of these tips as you continue planning.

HOLIDAY SNAPSHOT CHECK-IN

This check-in is designed to capture a well-rounded snapshot of your feelings, hopes, and intentions for the holiday season. This reflection will serve as a guiding “map” as you work through the workbook, helping you focus on the areas that need attention most.

Holiday Mindset: What one word best captures how you feel about this particular holiday?

Your Top Priority: If you could make one thing happen during this holiday, what would it be and why?

Reflect and Reset What's one thing you can let go of to create a more joyful holiday for you and your love one?

Anticipated Joys: What specific moments are you looking forward to the most? List up to 3.

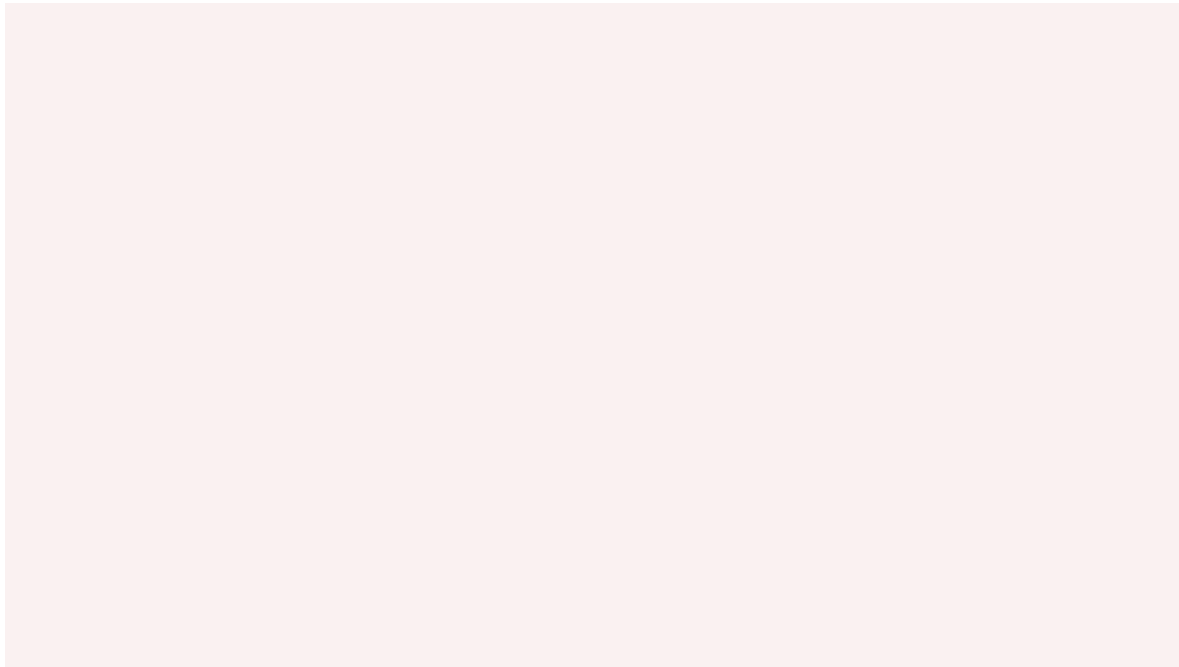
Expected Challenges: What challenges do you predict for this holiday?

THE HOLIDAYS IN A NEW LIGHT

HOLIDAY PRIORITIZATION EXERCISE

It's easy to get lost in the "shoulds" and "musts" of the holidays, but what really matters most? Identifying the top three priorities for your chosen holiday helps you focus on what will bring the most joy and connection. This exercise is about letting go of the extras and focusing on what will make the experience meaningful for you and your loved one.

In the box below, list your top three priorities for this holiday (e.g., specific people, traditions, or activities), and a brief explanation of why these priorities matter to you.



CHAPTER 1 CONCLUSION

You've taken an important first step in reflecting on your chosen holiday and understanding what's most meaningful. This will help guide your approach, allowing you to create a more focused and intentional experience. Remember, this is about prioritizing connection and finding joy in what truly matters.

As you prepare for the holiday, understanding your loved one's strengths and challenges will help you adapt traditions and create a supportive environment. Let's explore this further in Chapter 2.

2

Exploring Roles



Focus on the abilities present, not those
that have changed—there is always
something meaningful to share.

CHAPTER 2

Aphasia or other communication challenges can change how your loved one participates in holiday gatherings, but it doesn't change who they are. Whether they used to be the hostess, the life of the party, or the organizer, those roles may need to adapt.

This chapter is about **recognizing shifts in roles** and **finding new ways to connect** while also understanding the impact of communication environments and the energy demands of managing aphasia or dysarthria.

With thoughtful planning, you can help your loved one participate in meaningful ways, even if it looks different from before.

EXPLORING ROLES

REFLECTING ON PAST AND PRESENT ROLES

Think about the holiday you're planning for and the roles your loved one had in the past. Were they the person who welcomed everyone at the door, managed all the food, or kept guests entertained with stories? It's normal to feel a sense of loss when these roles change, but it's also a chance to discover new ways to adapt and keep your loved one engaged.

For example, **Shirley** was the ultimate hostess, ensuring everyone felt welcome, while simultaneously overseeing all of the preparations. However, due to her aphasia and mobility challenges, her role became more passive, and she often sat and watched from the sidelines. However, it doesn't have to be that way.

Shirley and her husband Peter planned and prepared with their family over a Zoom call to brainstorm ways to incorporate her into specific tasks, like cooking, selecting the table decorations, and evolving how they decorate the Christmas tree on Thanksgiving day. These small changes helped **Shirley** feel loved, included, and connected to her family.

Len was known for his lively, lengthy conversations, and was always at the center of discussions. After his stroke, his ability to speak fluently has been affected, but he can still join conversations if they go at a slower pace and people allow him time to find his words. His family helps by inviting him into smaller group settings, where the background noise is reduced and conversations are more manageable.

Bruce doesn't have trouble finding words, but his speech is affected by dysarthria, making it hard for others to understand him. He often feels self-conscious when people can't follow what he's saying, especially in noisy environments. His family ensures that conversations happen in quieter spaces, where he has a better chance of being understood.

Alvin used to take charge of hosting, coordinating everything from the menu to the guest list. Since his aphasia began affecting his speech, his confidence has waned because he struggles to find the right words during social interactions. He now focuses on smaller, simpler tasks that give him a sense of control, like setting up the playlist for background music or arranging place cards.

EXPLORING ROLES

REFLECTION: ROLES

What were your loved one's roles during previous holidays?

How have those roles changed since aphasia or other communication challenges?

What are some ways they can still participate, even if it looks different than before?

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENTS

The environment can significantly impact how well someone with aphasia or dysarthria can communicate. Factors like background noise, visual distractions, and the number of people in a room can make communication more difficult. It's important to be mindful of these elements to create an atmosphere where your loved one feels supported and included.

For example, **Len** finds it overwhelming to follow conversations in a room full of people talking, especially when background music is playing. His family learned to set aside a quiet space where **Len** could chat with one or two people at a time. This reduces the noise and makes it easier for him to stay engaged.

Practical Tips for Optimizing Communication Environments:

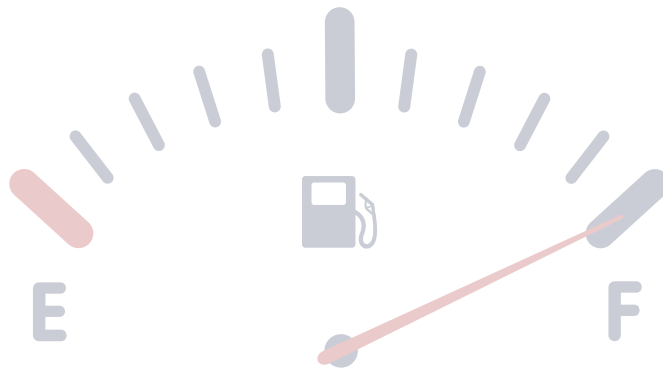
- **Minimize Background Noise:** Turn down music, close windows, or move away from noisy areas.
- **Create a Quiet Space:** Set up a quieter area where conversations can happen with less distraction.
- **Reduce Visual Clutter:** Avoid having too many visual distractions in the conversation area.
- **Limit Group Sizes:** Encourage smaller group conversations where communication is easier.
- **Be Aware of Lighting:** Good lighting can help with reading lips and facial expressions.

EXPLORING ROLES

THE GAS TANK CONCEPT

Think about your loved one starting the day with a gas tank that isn't quite full. With aphasia or dysarthria, the effort required to communicate is much higher, so the tank depletes faster than it would for someone without these challenges. Factors like noise, long conversations, and large groups can drain the tank more quickly, making it harder for your loved one to participate.

Bruce often feels exhausted after trying to communicate for long periods in noisy settings. His speech becomes harder to understand, and he feels embarrassed when people struggle to follow what he's saying. By scheduling breaks or having "quiet time," Bruce can recharge and rejoin conversations with more energy.



REFLECTION: GAS TANK AWARENESS

Think about what drains your loved one's 'gas tank' the fastest. Are there particular activities, environments, or times of day that make communication harder?

How can you help refill the tank? What breaks or changes in activities could help them recharge?

EXPLORING ROLES

IDENTIFYING COMMUNICATION STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

Understanding your loved one's communication abilities will help you choose strategies that make interactions smoother. Recognize their strengths, but also acknowledge the areas where they struggle.

Doris learned that **Gary** could follow conversations if they go slower with pauses built in, and that he responds well to yes/no questions or making choices between two options. Bruce can communicate clearly in quieter settings, but when there is too much noise, his speech becomes less intelligible, causing frustration for both him and his listeners.

ASSESSMENT: COMMUNICATION STRENGTHS

List your loved one's current communication strengths. For example: "Can express basic needs with gestures" or "Can follow short conversations in quiet settings."

List their main communication challenges. For example: "Struggles with long conversations" or "Needs more time to find words."

EXPLORING ROLES

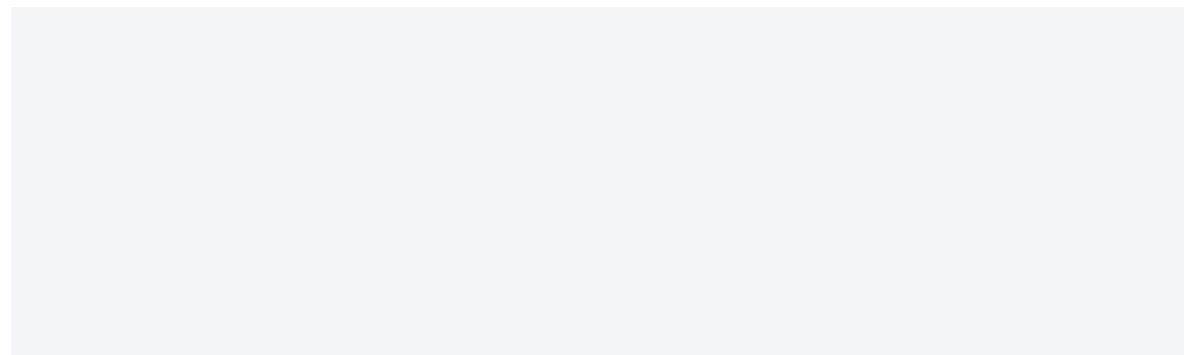
PRACTICAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Once you identify strengths and challenges, choose specific strategies that will support your loved one during your chosen holiday of focus. Start with a few strategies and practice leading up to that holiday.

Comprehensive Checklist of Communication Strategies:

- **Use Gestures or Visuals:** Incorporate gestures, pictures, or written words.
- **Ask Yes/No Questions:** Frame questions that can be answered with a nod or shake of the head.
- **Provide Choices:** Give two or three options to make responses easier.
- **Speak Slowly & Clearly:** Slow down and add pauses for processing.
- **Limit Background Noise:** Find quiet spaces or use noise-canceling headphones.
- **Use Communication Devices or Apps:** Explore tools that assist with speech.

Action Step: Pick 2-3 strategies to focus on and practice before the holiday. Write them down and note why you chose them.



QUICK TIPS FOR MANAGING EMBARRASSMENT OR FRUSTRATION

It's common for people with aphasia or dysarthria to feel embarrassed or frustrated when they struggle to communicate, especially in social settings. Strategies can help your loved one feel more confident and empowered during conversations. Here are some approaches to managing these emotions and keeping communication flowing smoothly.

Acknowledge the Effort, Not Just the Outcome:

Remind your loved one that it's okay to struggle and that the effort they put into communication is essential. For example, you could say, "I appreciate you working hard to share that with me. It's okay to take your time."

Use Humor to Defuse Tension:

Light humor can be a great way to ease embarrassment. If it's appropriate, you can just joke about the situation in a way that makes everyone feel comfortable. For example, "Whoa, **Len**, I think I see smoke coming out of your ears from all that hard thinking! Take your time—I'm impressed by your effort." Humor can help shift focus from frustration to shared connection.

EXPLORING ROLES

Establish a "Reset" Signal:

Having a reset signal allows your loved one to pause a conversation and take a moment to regroup without feeling pressured to speak. This can be a gesture, such as:

- **Holding up an open hand** (like a stop sign) to indicate "Give me a second."
- **Raising one finger** (index finger) to signal "I need one minute."
- **Placing a hand on their chest** to show they're having trouble and need a pause.

Teach these signals to family members so they understand what the gesture means, creating a respectful and supportive environment.

Practice a Recovery Phrase:

Work with your loved one on a phrase they can use when communication isn't going smoothly, such as, "I'm having a hard time getting the words out. Can you give me a moment?" or "I think my wife can help explain." This helps them set expectations with others and reduces the pressure to speak perfectly.

Encourage Breaks When Needed:

If your loved one is feeling overwhelmed, suggest taking a short break in a quiet area. Let them know it's okay to step away and recharge. Scheduling regular "quiet times" throughout the gathering can help keep their "gas tank" from depleting too quickly.

Shift to a Different Mode of Communication:

If speaking becomes difficult, try switching to an alternative mode of communication:

- **Write It Down:** Use a notebook, phone, or whiteboard.
- **Use Gestures or Point to Objects:** If words aren't coming, gestures can fill in the gaps.
- **Leverage Technology:** Use communication apps or text-to-speech features.

Having multiple communication options helps take the pressure off speaking and keeps the conversation going.

Model Patience and Acceptance for Others:

Show other family members how to respond gracefully if a communication breakdown happens. If your loved one is struggling to speak, stay calm and reassure them. For example, "Take your time, no rush—we'll figure it out together." This demonstrates to others how to be patient and supportive.

EXPLORING ROLES

CHAPTER 2 CONCLUSION

The holidays may look different, but with thoughtful planning, your loved one can still play a meaningful role. **Shirley** may no longer oversee every detail as the hostess, but she can choose decorations, help cook her favorite holiday dishes, decorate the tree, or help serve dessert.

Len may not dominate the room with lively conversations, but can engage in smaller group discussions. Understanding the impact of communication environments and managing the "gas tank" will help create an inclusive holiday where everyone can connect

Now that you've thought about communication strategies and roles, let's create a vision for your ideal holiday. In Chapter 3, we'll start planning holiday activities and experiences that will bring joy to you and your loved one.

3

Your Holiday Vision



Adaptability is a superpower. Let the season
flow with the changes, and create memories
along the way.

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER 3

The holidays are a time for celebration, connection, and tradition. However, when a loved one has aphasia or another communication challenge, it may take extra planning to ensure the festivities are enjoyable for everyone. In this chapter, you'll create a vision for your ideal holiday, incorporating meaningful activities that allow your loved one to participate in ways that work for them.

This chapter will guide you through:

- Reflecting on what makes the holiday special
- Planning specific activities that accommodate communication needs
- Choosing adaptations that allow for meaningful participation
- Including your loved one's preferences in the planning process
- Preparing for unexpected changes

YOUR HOLIDAY VISION

STEP 1: REFLECT ON WHAT MAKES THE HOLIDAY SPECIAL

Think about which holiday you're preparing for. What traditions, activities, or elements make it meaningful for you and your loved one? Whether it's the decorations, a special meal, or specific rituals, these are the aspects that bring the most joy and connection. Identifying them will help you focus on what truly matters.

For Example, as I mentioned earlier, I look forward to Thanksgiving because it's a time to gather with friends and family without the pressure of gift-giving. It's all about cooking a special meal together and creating an atmosphere of warmth and connection. On the other hand, New Year's Eve is special for my family because we review the highlights of the year, share our gratitude, and celebrate with a close group of loved ones.

Shirley and her husband have adapted their traditions by focusing on two dishes that she helps prepare, which lets her fulfill her role as hostess. They also blend old and new ornaments when decorating, symbolizing the mix of tradition and change. This approach helps **Shirley** stay connected to her past role while embracing new ways of celebrating.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

What are your favorite traditions for your chosen holiday, and why are they meaningful?

Who are the people you most look forward to seeing, and why is their presence special?

What activities bring you the most joy during this holiday?

YOUR HOLIDAY VISION

STEP 2: PLANNING ACTIVITIES THAT FOSTER CONNECTION

When planning holiday activities, think about what will bring out the best in your loved one and allow them to participate meaningfully. You may need to adapt traditional activities or add new ones that suit their communication needs. Remember, this isn't about doing everything perfectly—it's about finding moments of connection. Below are some activity ideas:

Greeting Game: Use a greeting activity where each guest receives a card with a prompt, such as "Ask the person on your left about their happiest moment this year." The person with aphasia can initiate the activity by calling out card numbers or using pre-written prompts to lead the game. This provides a structured way to engage and takes some pressure off spontaneous conversation.

Selfie Station or Photo Sharing: Set up a "selfie station" where your loved one can take pictures with different guests throughout the day. Like Gary, who now enjoys taking selfies with family members, this can be a great way to keep your loved one involved.

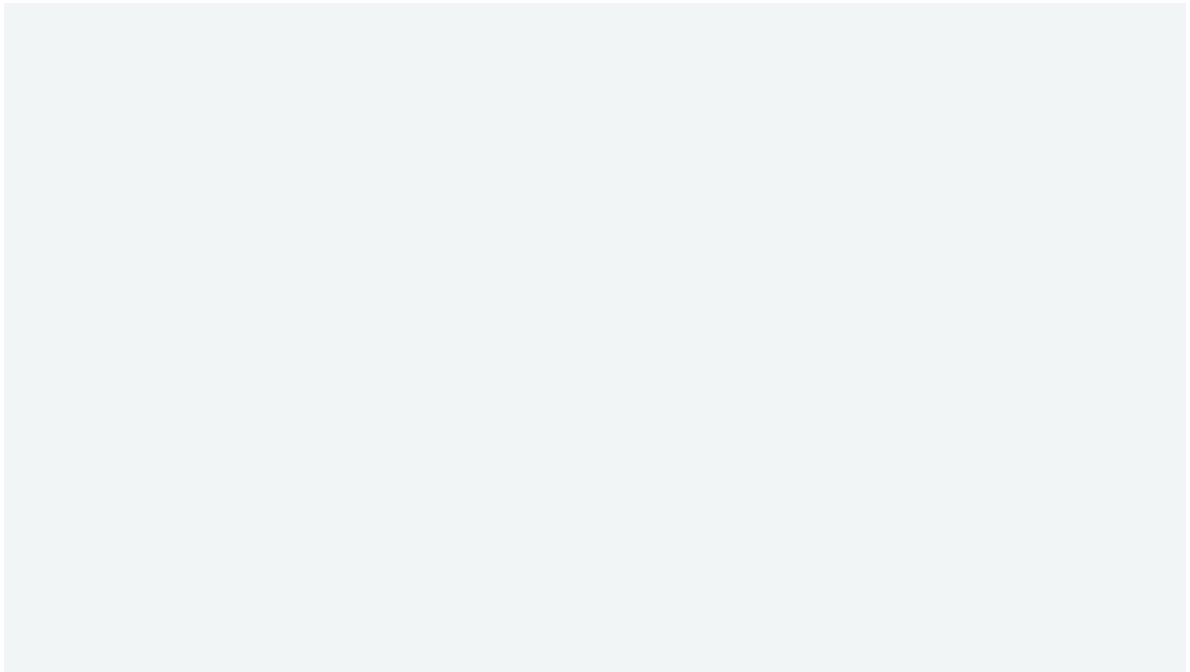
Decorating Together: For **Shirley**, decorating the Christmas tree over Thanksgiving weekend helps blend traditions and get her into the holiday spirit. Adapt this activity to your loved one's abilities by allowing them to choose ornaments or decorations.

YOUR HOLIDAY VISION

Card Games or Simple Board Games: Choose games that involve basic choices or simple tasks. **Len** enjoys smaller group settings where he can play a card game like Go Fish or Rummy with his granddaughters.

Creating a "Memory Jar": Have guests write down a favorite memory from the past year and place it in a jar. The person with aphasia can help read the memories aloud, or a family member can read them while your loved one listens and reacts.

Action Step: Pick 2-3 activities from the list above, or create your own. Write down how you will adapt them to ensure your loved one can participate meaningfully.



YOUR HOLIDAY VISION

STEP 3: INVOLVING YOUR LOVED ONE IN THE PLANNING

To make the holiday more enjoyable and meaningful, involve your loved one in the planning process. Ask for their preferences, listen to their input, and find ways to incorporate their ideas. This not only helps them feel more engaged but also sets the stage for a holiday experience that reflects their interests and abilities.

On the following page, you'll find three prompts to ask your loved one. Go through them together.

PROMPTS TO ASK YOUR LOVED ONE

What activities do you enjoy most during this holiday?

Are there any specific tasks you would like to help with?

Is there anything you find stressful or challenging during this holiday?

YOUR HOLIDAY VISION

STEP 4: ADAPTING TRADITIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Adapting traditions isn't about letting go of cherished customs; it's about finding new ways to connect and celebrate together. Here are some ways some families are embracing creative solutions to make the holidays inclusive and joyful.

- **Shirley** decorates the Christmas tree as each grandchild brings a new box of ornaments to add to the original ones, blending old and new memories.
- **Len** sets up multiple quiet conversation spots in his home and practices simple conversation starters, making it easier to connect without feeling pressured.
- **Alvin** created a “quiet corner” for breaks during busy gatherings, allowing him to balance family time with his need for rest.
- **Doris and Gary** each play a new role: Doris focuses on cooking just one or two dishes, while Gary, the “family photographer,” captures the day's memories with his phone.
- **Bruce** chooses smaller gatherings with close family, where he feels comfortable practicing new speech techniques and participating.

Small adjustments like these keep everyone involved and make the holiday truly inclusive. Consider what roles or activities might work best for your loved one—honoring past traditions while embracing new ways to celebrate together.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR ADAPTING TRADITIONS

The holidays don't have to be overwhelming. Minor adjustments can make a big difference in creating a **joyful and inclusive experience** for you and your loved one.

Use the checkboxes to mark the tips that feel most helpful for your situation. By selecting the ones that resonate, you can **focus on what matters most** and **create a manageable and meaningful plan**.

- Simplify Tasks:** Break down tasks into smaller steps, such as setting out silverware instead of preparing an entire meal.
- Embrace Shorter Activities:** Opt for shorter, more frequent activities rather than long events that may be tiring.
- Use Visual Aids:** Incorporate visual supports like picture boards or written prompts to make communication easier.
- Plan for Breaks:** Schedule downtime to prevent "gas tank" depletion. Set aside a quiet space where your loved one can rest if needed.
- Delegate Responsibilities:** Ask family members or guests to take on specific roles to reduce the pressure on you and your loved one.
- Plan Ahead with a Family Call:** Have a call or Zoom meeting with family to brainstorm ideas and organize holiday plans together, ensuring everyone is prepared to support your loved one's needs.

YOUR HOLIDAY VISION

EXAMPLE VISUAL PLANNING TEMPLATE

Use this template to map out your holiday plans, ensuring that activities, quiet spaces, and specific roles are organized clearly.

ACTIVITY	WHO	LOCATION	TIME	BREAKS
<i>decorate the tree</i>	<i>Shirley + grandkids</i>	<i>Living Room</i>	<i>2pm-3pm</i>	<i>30 min after</i>
<i>card games</i>	<i>Len + family</i>	<i>Patio</i>	<i>4pm - 4:30pm</i>	<i>after dinner rest for 20 min</i>
<i>dessert + games</i>	<i>Bruce + siblings</i>	<i>Dining Room</i>	<i>7pm - 8pm</i>	<i>quiet room avail</i>

YOUR VISUAL PLANNING TEMPLATE

ACTIVITY	WHO	LOCATION	TIME	BREAKS



YOUR HOLIDAY VISION

STEP 5: PLAN B – HANDLING THE UNEXPECTED

No matter how well you plan, unexpected changes can occur. It's essential to be flexible and have a backup plan for dealing with disruptions or changes in energy levels. Below, you'll find some Plan B suggestions.

Shift an Activity to a Quieter Location: If the activity becomes too noisy, move it to a quieter room or outdoor space.

Shorten the Duration of Activities: Don't be afraid to end an activity early if it's tiring for your loved one.

Switch to an Alternative Mode of Communication: If speaking becomes too difficult, use gestures, writing, or a communication app.

Schedule Additional Breaks as Needed: If your loved one seems overwhelmed, add extra breaks.

Reframe Expectations: Focus on the moments that went well rather than striving for perfection.

Share a Communication Guide: Create a quick "cheat sheet" for family members with tips on how to communicate effectively, like slowing down or asking yes/no questions.

Prepare with Words: Anticipate situations and be ready with simple phrases. For example, "The meal was lovely. Henry's exhausted, so we need to say good bye."

REFLECTION

What will you do if your loved one becomes overwhelmed? List 3 alternative plans:

YOUR HOLIDAY VISION

OPTIONAL REFLECTION: LETTING GO OF OLD TRADITIONS

It's natural to feel a sense of loss when old traditions have to change. However, letting go of some traditions can make room for new and meaningful ways to celebrate. Consider the example of **Shirley**, who now incorporates both new ornaments and a few special old ones when decorating the tree. This represents a blend of tradition and change.

What old traditions do you feel are difficult to let go of?

How can you honor old traditions while making room for new ones?

What new traditions could be added to make the holiday meaningful?

CHAPTER 3 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, you've redefined what the holidays can mean by busting myths and adapting traditions to create a more inclusive celebration. With insights from real people like Doris, Gary, and Len, you now have practical ideas that center connection and joy.

By involving your loved one in planning, being flexible, and having a Plan B, you're crafting a holiday that honors old and new traditions in ways that genuinely fit your family's needs.

LOOKING AHEAD: REAL-LIFE CONVERSATIONS

In Chapter 4, we'll dive into scripts, strategies, and tools for navigating the conversations that make the holiday season meaningful. Together, we'll explore ways to set boundaries, empower communication, and create an environment where your loved one feels heard and valued.

4

Sharing The Plan



Communicate with courage and
compassion—others are ready to support
when they understand.

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER 4

The holiday season brings both joy and challenges, especially when a loved one has aphasia or dysarthria. Preparing guests to understand your loved one's communication needs can make all the difference. This chapter will guide you in sharing the right amount of information, setting expectations, and equipping others to support inclusive and meaningful communication.

Why This Matters

Taking the time to educate others about aphasia or dysarthria helps reduce misunderstandings, ensures smoother interactions, and makes the holiday more enjoyable for everyone. When guests know how to engage effectively, your loved one feels more included and less frustrated.

SHARING THE PLAN

STEP 1: DECIDING HOW MUCH TO SHARE

What to Consider

Decide how much information to share based on your comfort level and your loved one's needs. Some prefer a simple tip, while others benefit from a more detailed explanation. The goal is to provide helpful guidance without overwhelming your guests.

When guests arrive, Doris briefly explains: "Gary communicates best if you speak slowly and ask yes/no questions. If you're unsure what he's saying, try showing him an object or using a picture. You can also ask him if he can use his phone to show you what he means." This quick tip ensures guests have enough information to support Gary without needing a lengthy discussion.

Len's family sends a brief email to guests a few days before the gathering. They keep it simple: "Hi everyone! **Len** is excited for the holiday, but wants you to know **he needs a little extra time to respond** when you are talking together. Please give him some time and avoid finishing his sentences. Thank you for helping make the day more inclusive for him."

REFLECTION

How much detail are you comfortable sharing about your loved one's communication needs? List 2-3 key points that you'll share with guests.

SHARING THE PLAN

STEP 2: DIFFERENT WAYS TO SHARE INFORMATION

Options for Educating Guests

Educating others doesn't always have to be verbal. Here are different ways to inform guests about your loved one's communication strategies:

Direct Conversations

- Communicate with key family members or friends in advance, letting them know which strategies will be most helpful.
- Example: **Doris** might share, "Gary responds well to visual cues. If you're unsure what he's saying, try pointing to objects related to the conversation."

Emails or Texts to Guests

- Send out a message before the event, including helpful communication tips.
- Sample Text: "Remember, when talking to **Shirley**, give her extra time to respond, and use short sentences. She might also point to things to help explain herself."

Printed Guides or Handouts

- Use visual aids, such as printed communication tips, to remind guests of best practices. Place them in common areas like the fridge, coffee table, or bathroom mirror. Consider using the **Aphasia Conversation Pieces** as a downloadable resource.

TIP: Place communication guides where guests will see them naturally, such as near the seating area.

REFLECTION

Which method(s) will you use to share communication strategies with your guests? How will you implement it?

SHARING THE PLAN

STEP 3: SETTING UP THE ENVIRONMENT FOR COMMUNICATION SUCCESS

Setting up the environment is just as important as informing guests. A communication-friendly setting can significantly improve interactions.

Reduce Background Noise

Choose quieter rooms for conversations, turn off TVs, and keep background music low.

Examples:

- **Shirley's** family divided the gathering into smaller areas where different activities took place, allowing her to engage more comfortably in quieter settings.
- **Alvin's** daughter arranged a quiet space at the gathering where he could step away when needed, reducing the impact of noise.

Strategic Seating Arrangements

Place your loved one near people who understand their communication needs. Avoid seating them in areas with high noise levels (like near the kitchen).

Examples:

- **Len** created multiple seating areas, allowing for smaller group conversations where he could participate more easily.
- When attending a small family event, **Bruce** sat at a round table where he could see everyone clearly, making it easier to engage.

REFLECTION

What changes will you make to the environment for your holiday gathering? How will these changes help your loved one?

SHARING THE PLAN

STEP 4: RESPONDING TO DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

Despite your best preparations, there may still be moments when communication breaks down or becomes frustrating. Here are strategies to help in those situations.

Use "Reset" Signals

Create a simple gesture or phrase to indicate a pause is needed.

Examples:

- **Len** raises his hand slightly as a "pause" gesture when he needs more time.
- **Bruce** uses a thumbs-up to indicate when he's ready to continue.

Incorporate Humor to Lighten the Mood

Humor can ease tension and make the moment feel lighter.

Examples:

- "Looks like my brain hit a traffic jam—give me a moment to find the right lane!"
- "I'm warming up my words—thanks for being patient."

Call for Help When Needed

Sometimes, the person with aphasia or dysarthria may need extra help to communicate their message.

Example: If communication stalls, your loved one can say, "I think my spouse can help explain."

REFLECTION

What will your Plan B be if a communication breakdown occurs? Describe how you will handle the situation and who can assist.

SHARING THE PLAN

BONUS DOWNLOAD + REFLECTION

APHASIA CONVERSATION PIECES

This resources is perfect for sharing with the guests attending your holiday events. You could share ahead of time or place around the house.



Where will you place the Aphasia Conversation Pieces in your home? How will you introduce them to guests?

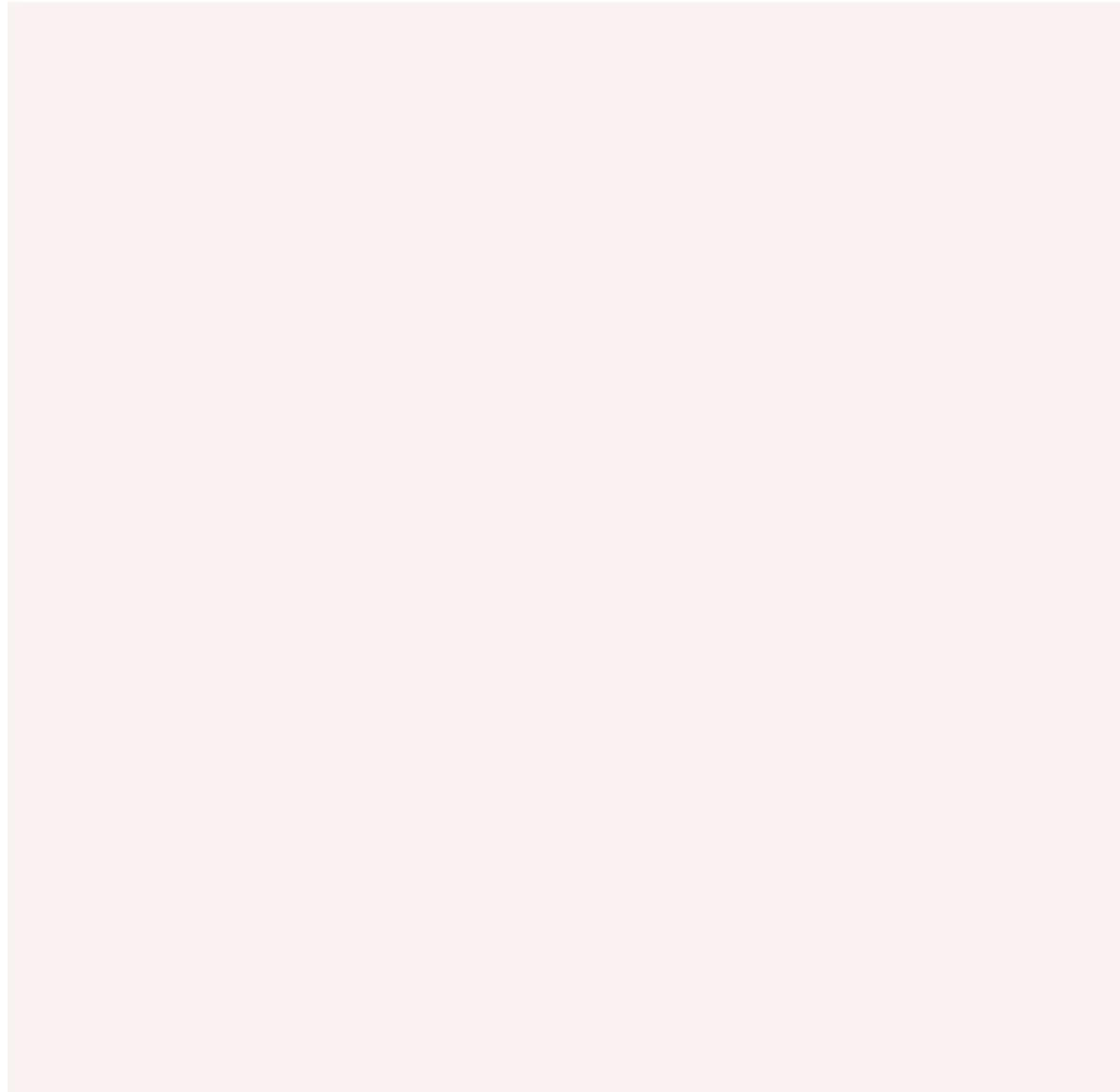
TOP 3 STRATEGIES

Review the strategies from this chapter to prepare for your holiday gathering. Planning for communication success involves setting clear expectations, educating guests, and creating an environment that supports your loved one.

List the top three strategies you'll use for the holiday gathering and explain why you chose them.

SHARING THE PLAN

NOTES



CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION

As you set the stage for a welcoming holiday, you've taken powerful steps toward creating an environment where connection and understanding flourish. Remember, it's not about saying everything perfectly, but rather setting clear expectations, being proactive, and allowing space for your loved one to be fully present. These adjustments make a profound difference, opening the door for moments of joy and true communication with family and friends.

Looking Ahead: Real-Life Conversations

In Chapter 5, we'll explore how to approach hosting the holidays with both ease and intention. From organizing tasks and finding ways to simplify preparations to rethinking long-held traditions, you'll discover practical strategies for transforming hosting into a joyful experience that works for everyone.

5

Hosting with Ease



Release the need to 'do it all' and let your
presence be enough.

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER 5

Why Do We Host?

For many, hosting holiday gatherings is more than just a duty—it's a **source of pride, a way to share favorite traditions, and an opportunity to create the perfect atmosphere.**

Whether it's about showcasing your cooking skills, upholding family customs, or bringing loved ones together, **hosting can feel special.** But sometimes, it can also feel overwhelming, especially when you have a loved one with aphasia or dysarthria.

So, **why do we host?** Is it for control, to ensure everything meets our standards? Is it about the joy of having people in our home or the comfort of familiar surroundings? For me, my love language is service. I love to cook for others. Honestly, I love the challenge of cooking a full meal and serving it perfectly!

Whatever your reasons, it's essential to reflect on whether these **motivations serve you now or add to your stress.**

This chapter will help you redefine hosting, let go of unrealistic expectations, and explore practical ways to adapt holiday plans prioritizing connection over perfection.

STEP 1: LETTING GO OF "ALL OR NOTHING" THINKING

Challenge the Belief That You Must Do It All

Many hosts feel the need to uphold every tradition exactly as it has always been, fearing that letting go of any part will diminish the holiday. However, this "all or nothing" mentality can cause stress and exhaustion, making it hard to enjoy the gathering. Adapting traditions, delegating tasks, or letting someone else host for a change is okay.

Common Limiting Beliefs About Hosting

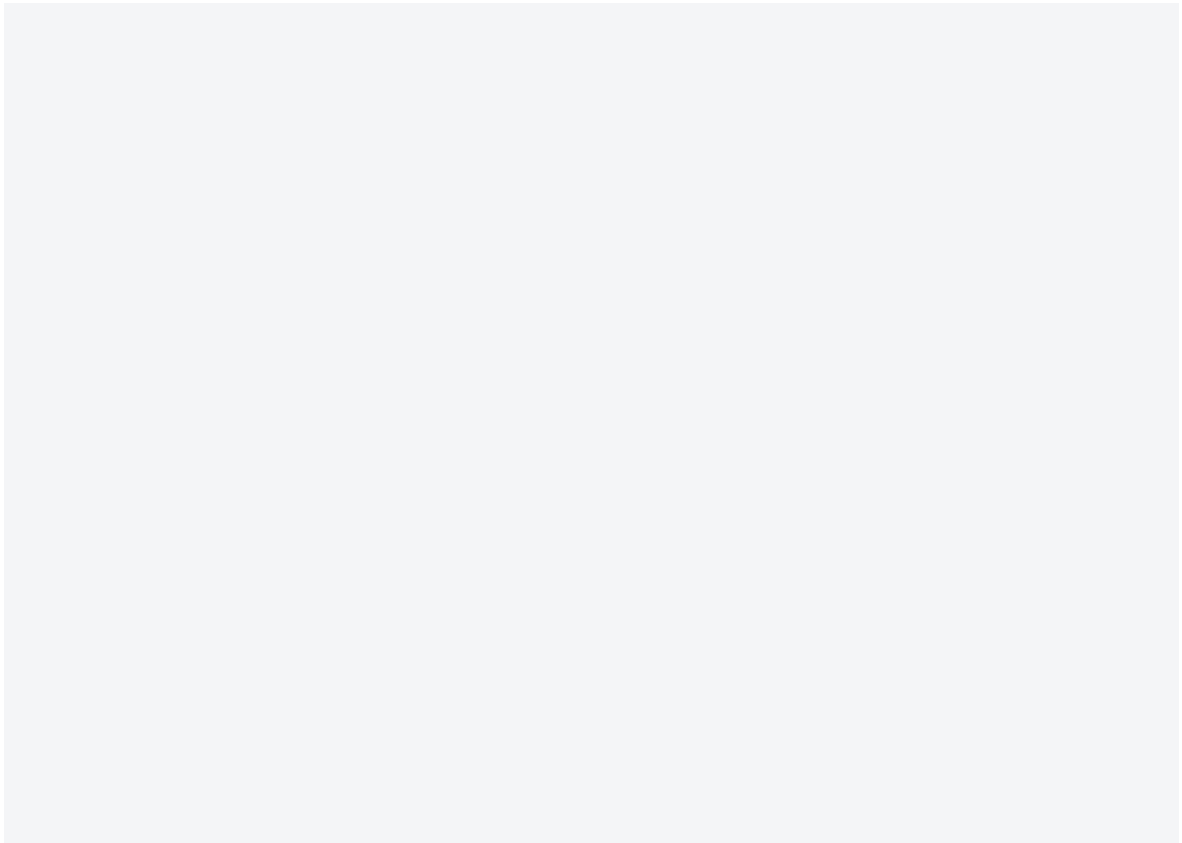
- "If I don't cook everything myself, it won't be special."
- "Hosting is my role, and no one else can do it the way I do."
- "The holiday won't be the same if I change anything."
- "I can't ask others to help; it's my responsibility to ensure everything goes perfectly."

Examples of Letting Go and Simplifying

- **Shirley** used to host large holiday dinners, but after her stroke, she focused on just two dishes that she could help prepare, allowing others to bring side dishes. This gave her the feeling of hosting without taking on the entire burden.
- **Len** switched from organizing large, bustling gatherings to smaller, themed dinners that allowed him to engage without feeling overwhelmed. This let him maintain the holiday spirit in a way that worked for him.

ACTIVITY: BRAINSTORM ALTERNATIVES TOGETHER

Discuss with family and friends ways to simplify. Ask guests what holiday activities they enjoy most. This will help you determine which traditions are truly essential and which ones can be adjusted or let go.



TIP: Ask others what they love most about the holiday. This will help you focus on the aspects that matter and let go of the rest.

HOSTING WITH EASE

REFLECTION

List any beliefs you have about hosting that might be causing stress. What small changes can you make to challenge those beliefs?

STEP 2: ENLIST HELP AND DELEGATE TASKS

Why Asking for Help Is Important

The belief that you must do everything can make it hard to ask for help. But sharing responsibilities isn't just practical—it's a way to make the holiday more enjoyable for everyone. Delegating tasks shows that hosting is a shared experience, not a solo burden.

Delegate Early and Clearly

Examples:

- **Doris** used to prepare everything herself, but now she asks guests to bring specific dishes, set the table, or help clean up. By delegating tasks, she can focus on greeting guests and enjoying the celebration.
- **Alvin's Family** took over organizing games and entertainment, allowing him to focus on meaningful conversations. This approach made the holiday more relaxed and less chaotic.

Practical Tips for Delegating

- **Make a List of Tasks:** Identify which tasks you can delegate, such as cooking, decorating, or cleanup.
- **Be Specific in Your Requests:** Instead of saying, "Can someone help with dinner?" say, "Could you bring a dessert?" or "Could you help set the table?"

TIP: The more specific you are about what you need, the more likely others will be able to help effectively.

HOSTING WITH EASE

DELEGATE WITH EASE

Delegating holiday tasks isn't about losing control—it's about inviting others into the joy of hosting. Consider this an opportunity to share the experience, making it more enjoyable and less overwhelming.

What are 2-3 tasks that would ease your stress if someone else handled them?

Which family members or friends would genuinely enjoy helping with these tasks?

How can I frame this as a meaningful way to include them in our holiday?

STEP 3: SIMPLIFYING THE HOLIDAY EXPERIENCE

Alternative Hosting Ideas

Rethink what it means to host. There are many ways to simplify without compromising on quality or fun. It's about finding a balance that works for you.

Suggested Alternative Hosting Ideas

- **Potluck-Style Gathering:** Invite guests to bring a dish, creating a shared meal experience that reduces your cooking load.
- **Order Premade Dishes:** Combine a few homemade favorites with premade items from a local restaurant or grocery store.
- **Plan Group Activities in Shifts:** Organize activities in segments, such as outdoor games in the morning and a smaller meal later. This reduces fatigue and keeps the day relaxed.
- **Use Disposable Plates and Utensils:** Consider using high-quality disposable items to cut down on cleanup time.

Learn from Others' Experiences

- Ask family members, friends, or people at your book club or church about how they host during the holidays. You might find some helpful suggestions, such as hosting a brunch instead of dinner or setting up a self-serve buffet.

HOSTING WITH EASE

REFLECTION

What new ideas can you use to simplify your holiday plans? Which options feel realistic and enjoyable?

STEP 4: REDUCING THE NUMBER OF GUESTS

Keeping It Small

Limiting the guest list to make the gathering more manageable is okay. Focus on inviting the people who will be most understanding and supportive.

What to Say to Those Who Might Expect to Be Invited

- "We're keeping it smaller this year to make it more relaxed for everyone. I hope you understand. We'll find another time to catch up."
- "With everything going on, we're hosting a smaller group, but we'll make plans to see each other soon."
- "I'd love to have everyone, but we're keeping things simple this year."

Give Yourself Permission to Say No or Make Other Requests

You don't need to apologize or over-explain your decision (for anything). Be direct about it. Your reasons are valid, and it's vital to prioritize well-being.

Suggested Phrases:

- "We need to keep things low-key this year to make it easier on us."
- "We're trying something different to make the holiday less overwhelming."
- "Thank you for understanding. We're trying to keep things simple."

TIP: Your boundaries are important. State your plan confidently, and if the other person suggests alternatives, be open to discussing, but don't feel the need to justify your decision repeatedly.

HOSTING WITH EASE

REFLECTION

What are your concerns about reducing the guest list? Write down what you would say to someone, and practice it out loud. Use the space to jot down notes and practice in the mirror.

STEP 5: CREATING A FLEXIBLE SCHEDULE AND ACTIVITIES

Plan Your Day in Segments

Divide the day into smaller events or segments to keep the energy levels up and avoid fatigue.

Examples

- **Start with a Brunch for Close Family:** Follow with a rest period and a smaller afternoon or evening gathering.
- **Host Multiple Smaller Gatherings Over a Few Days:** This can spread the celebration and reduce the pressure of one big event.
- **Include Flexible Activities:** Set up stations where people can do crafts, play board games, or sing carols in smaller groups.

Sample Activities to Consider

- **Games:** Choose board games that can be played in rounds so guests can come and go.
- **Outdoor Activities:** If the weather is nice, organize a walk or outdoor game. It allows for breaks and gives your loved one time to rest inside.
- **Craft Stations:** Set up areas for holiday crafts, card-making, or cookie decorating.
- **Movie Viewing Space:** A movie room offers a quieter activity for those who need a break.

HOSTING WITH EASE

REFLECTION

What timing changes and activities will help make your holiday more manageable? Write down your flexible schedule and activity ideas.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

As you reimagine the role of hosting this season, remember that flexibility and connection are the core ingredients of a memorable holiday. Allowing yourself to simplify traditions, delegate tasks, and communicate your needs brings peace to the gathering—and more time for genuine interaction. With these adjustments, you can make the holiday experience rewarding and comfortable for everyone.

Looking Ahead: Attending + Traveling

In the next chapter, we'll dive into practical strategies for attending holiday events and traveling comfortably with your loved one. Whether close by or across the country, there are simple steps you can take to prepare, set boundaries, and ensure a smooth and enjoyable holiday journey.

HOSTING WITH EASE

REFLECTION

What changes will you make to your holiday plans? List 3 strategies you will use to keep the day simple and enjoyable.

6

Attending and Traveling



Every step we take is a step toward connection. Enjoy the journey, not just the destination.

CHAPTER 6

Attending holiday gatherings can bring **joy and connection**, but it can also be daunting when supporting a loved one with aphasia or mobility challenges. From bustling social environments to logistical hurdles, holiday events require a careful balance to ensure everyone feels included, comfortable, and relaxed.

In this chapter, you'll find practical strategies to reduce stress and navigate common challenges like noisy gatherings, accessibility concerns, and the need for extra downtime. This isn't just about communication—it's about **proactively planning for physical, emotional, and logistical needs** to make holiday events enjoyable for everyone.

With tips on creating quiet spaces, scheduling rest breaks, and preparing for unexpected situations, this chapter will guide you in crafting a holiday experience that honors your loved one's unique needs while allowing everyone to fully participate and celebrate.

ATTENDING AND TRAVELING

STEP 1: PREPARING FOR TRAVEL

Traveling requires flexibility and additional planning. The goal is to reduce stress and build in downtime for rest and relaxation.

Add Extra Time for Travel

- **Driving:** Split longer trips over two days with an overnight stay to avoid travel fatigue. Plan rest stops every 1-2 hours for stretching.
- **Flying:** Build in extra time before and after the flight for relaxation.
- **Buffer Days:** Arrive a day early to rest before the holiday events, and consider staying a day after to avoid a rushed departure.

Alternative Travel Options

- **Break the Day into Smaller Visits:** Instead of a full day, visit for shorter periods, such as coming for dessert on Thanksgiving and then breakfast the next day. This keeps gatherings manageable.
- **Permission to Stay Elsewhere:** It's okay to decline staying at a relative's house and book a hotel instead. A hotel can provide a quiet space to recharge.

Sample Travel Itineraries

- **Option 1:** Drive 4 hours, stay overnight, and finish the trip the next morning.
- **Option 2:** Fly to the destination, rest at a hotel, and join family the next afternoon.

TIP: You don't have to stay with family just because it's a tradition. A hotel stay can be a great way to ensure everyone gets the rest they need.

REFLECTION

What travel adjustments can you make to reduce stress? Write down considerations for your journey.

STEP 2: CHOOSING ACCOMMODATIONS

Important Considerations When Booking a Hotel

The right accommodations can make a big difference in comfort and accessibility.

Accessibility Options

- **Request a Handicap-Accessible Room:** Look for features like grab bars, roll-in showers, and a shower bench.
- **Room Setup Considerations:** Make sure the bed is at the right height and consider accessibility from the preferred side.

Permission to Stay at a Hotel Instead of a Relative's House

- **A Hotel Can Be a Smart Choice:** It offers a quiet place to relax, more privacy, and the chance to recharge.

TIP: If your relative's house is cluttered or has multiple stairs, staying at a hotel may be safer and more convenient.

Checklist for Booking Accommodations

- Request a handicap-accessible room.
- Ask for a quiet room away from busy areas.
- Confirm features like a roll-in shower, shower bench, or accessible bathroom.
- Ensure the room is near an elevator or on the ground floor.

REFLECTION

What specific accommodations will make your stay more comfortable? Write down your preferences.

ATTENDING AND TRAVELING

STEP 3: PACKING ESSENTIALS FOR COMFORT, COMMUNICATION, AND MOBILITY

Packing for Sensory Comfort and Mobility Needs

Prepare for sensory overload and mobility challenges by packing the right items.

Sensory Comfort Items

- **LOOP Earplugs or Noise-Canceling Headphones:** Reduce background noise while allowing for conversation.
- **Comfort Items:** Pack a cozy blanket, neck pillow, or favorite calming music.

Mobility Considerations

- **Extra Clothing and Underthings:** Pack spare clothes and undergarments in case of spills or bathroom accidents.
- **Bathroom Planning:** If your loved one needs assistance, discuss bathroom arrangements with the host beforehand.

TIP: If the house has lots of stairs or cluttered spaces, discuss alternatives with the host or make a plan for navigating these areas safely.

Emergency Items Checklist

- Extra medical supplies (if needed)
- Emergency contact list
- Medications and prescriptions
- Extra undergarments, jacket, blanket

Learn More
About LOOP
Earplugs



REFLECTION

What items will you pack to ensure comfort, effective communication, and mobility?

ATTENDING AND TRAVELING

STEP 4: PLANNING REST BREAKS AND DOWNTIME

Build Downtime into the Schedule

Attending holiday events can be tiring, so plan for breaks and quiet time.

Divide the Day into Shorter Visits

- **Morning and Evening Segments:** Visit for breakfast, take a break, and return for an afternoon gathering.
- **Stay Flexible with Your Schedule:** Be prepared to leave early if your loved one becomes fatigued.

Creating a Quiet Space at the Gathering

- **Request a Rest Area:** Ask the host for a quiet room where your loved one can take breaks.
- **Choose Times to Attend:** Visit during less crowded times, such as after the meal when some guests have left.

REFLECTION

How will you build downtime into your travel and holiday plans? Write down specific rest times and locations.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATING WITH HOSTS AND OTHER GUESTS

Informing the Host and Guests About Communication and Mobility Needs

It's helpful to set expectations and share strategies for communication and mobility in advance.

Send an Email or Call the Host

- **Explain Your Needs:** Share your loved one's preferences for communication and any mobility concerns, such as needing extra space to navigate.
- **Discuss Bathroom Accessibility:** If bathroom assistance is needed, talk about arrangements ahead of time.

Sample Email for Communicating with the Host

- **Subject Line:** "Holiday Gathering – Accessibility and Communication Tips"
- **Body:** "Hi [Host's Name], I wanted to share some information to make the gathering comfortable for [Loved One's Name]. If possible, we'd appreciate a quiet area for breaks, and it helps if people speak slowly. We may also need to discuss bathroom arrangements. Thank you for understanding!"

Bring Printed Communication and Mobility Tips

Use *Aphasia Conversation Pieces* to guide guests on communication, and bring mobility aids if necessary.

REFLECTION

What information will you share with the host, and how will you communicate it?
Draft your message or script below.

STEP 6: EMERGENCY AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING

Plan for the Unexpected

Travel and gatherings can be unpredictable. Being prepared helps you handle surprises with ease.

Doris and Gary had been planning to attend a family reunion in North Carolina for months. Knowing Gary was still recovering from an illness, Doris took extra precautions. She called the hotel manager and asked for a video of the room they'd booked to ensure there were no unexpected barriers. Before they left, she packed a separate bag with essentials—medications, comfort items, disinfecting wipes, tissues, paper towels, and a change of clothes. Midway through the drive, Gary had a flare-up of symptoms. Thanks to her preparedness, Doris was able to handle the situation quickly by pulling off the highway and accessing their 'just-in-case' bag.

Create a Backup Plan

- **Emergency Contacts and Locations:** Know the nearest urgent care centers, hospitals, or pharmacies.
- **Alternative Plans:** If the gathering becomes overwhelming, consider taking breaks, leaving early, or scheduling a follow-up visit when it's less crowded.

Emergency Items Checklist

- List of medications and medical contacts
- Extra medical supplies
- Directions to local medical facilities

REFLECTION

What emergency preparations will you make? Write down your backup plan.

ATTENDING AND TRAVELING

STEP 7: MANAGING EXPECTATIONS AND EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES

Acknowledge Emotional Aspects of Traveling

Traveling and attending gatherings can bring stress, anxiety, or sadness. It's okay if things don't go perfectly.

Permission to Celebrate Differently

- **Holidays Aren't Just About the Date:** Thanksgiving, Christmas, or any holiday can be celebrated before or after the actual day. The important thing is connecting with loved ones.
- **Celebrate Throughout the Year:** Visiting family at other times can reduce the pressure on the holidays.

Embrace Flexibility and Adjust as Needed

- **Consider Smaller Gatherings or Changing Locations:** If the event feels overwhelming, it's okay to scale back.

Be Honest About Your Needs: Communicate clearly with family about what works best for your loved one.

REFLECTION

How can you adjust your plans to reduce stress? List 3 strategies for staying flexible.

ATTENDING AND TRAVELING

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

This chapter emphasizes preparing for all aspects of attending or traveling for holiday gatherings, including physical, communication, and emotional needs. The goal is to make the experience enjoyable, stress-free, and centered on connection.

Quick Tips for Traveling + Attending Gatherings

1. Break Visits into Smaller Segments
2. Pack for Comfort, Communication, and Mobility
3. Communicate Early and Clearly with Hosts
4. Have a Backup Plan for Emergencies

REFLECTION

What 3 strategies will help you make traveling easier and more enjoyable? How will they benefit you and your loved one?

7

Holiday Self-Care



Small acts of self-care add up to
resilience. Find a few minutes each
day just for you.

CHAPTER 7

Why Self-Care Matters

Taking time for self-care during the holidays isn't a luxury; it's a necessity. Both you and your loved one with aphasia are navigating additional layers of holiday stress—social gatherings, travel, and the pressure to maintain traditions. It's easy to feel drained when focusing on making everything special for everyone else.

But remember, prioritizing your own well-being allows you to show up with greater energy, patience, and resilience. Self-care isn't about setting aside time for indulgence; it's about giving yourself the space to recharge, even if that's in 5-minute intervals.

This chapter will guide you through practical self-care practices tailored to the unique demands of caregiving and holiday responsibilities. You'll learn how to recognize your needs, set boundaries, and carve out small moments of rest to help you make the most of the season—while still enjoying meaningful connections with your loved one.

HOLIDAY SELF-CARE

RECOGNIZING WHEN SELF-CARE IS NEEDED FOR YOU

Many caregivers and loved ones ignore the signs that they need a break. Here are some ways to identify when self-care is overdue:

- **Increased Stress:** Noticeable tension, irritability, and feeling "on edge" or overwhelmed could indicate a need for a pause.
- **Snapping or Irritability:** Becoming short-tempered or snapping at your loved one or others over small things can indicate burnout.
- **Physical Symptoms:** Frequent headaches, fatigue, muscle tension, or disrupted sleep patterns are common stress signals.
- **Loss of Interest:** Feeling disconnected from activities you once enjoyed or withdrawing from social interactions.
- **Forgetfulness or Absentmindedness:** Difficulty focusing, forgetting tasks, or feeling mentally foggy can be signs of mental exhaustion.
- **Neglecting Personal Needs:** Skipping meals, forgetting to drink water, or neglecting personal hygiene are signs of overlooking one's well-being.

RECOGNIZING WHEN SELF-CARE IS NEEDED FOR YOUR LOVED ONE WITH APHASIA

Look for these signs that may indicate your loved one with aphasia needs a break:

- **Increased Frustration or Irritability:** Signs of frustration during conversations may mean they need a break.
- **Withdrawing from Conversations:** If they seem quiet or avoid speaking, they could feel overwhelmed.
- **Physical Discomfort:** Watch for signs like muscle tension, headaches, or visible fatigue.
- **Difficulty Finding Words:** Struggling more than usual with words can signal mental exhaustion.
- **Frequent Pauses or Silence:** More pauses or long silences may indicate they need a moment to reset.
- **Loss of Interest in Social Activities:** Declining invitations or appearing disengaged can mean they're overstimulated.
- **Visible Anxiety or Nervousness:** Signs like restlessness or fidgeting can show they're overwhelmed.
- **Physical Signs of Fatigue:** Yawning, rubbing temples, or slumping can signal it's time for a break.

HOLIDAY SELF-CARE

SELF-CARE STRATEGIES FOR YOU, THE CAREGIVER

It's easy to forget about your own needs when caregiving. Here are practical steps you can take:

- **Seek Support:** Reach out to friends or support groups where you can share experiences and gain encouragement.
- **Delegate Tasks:** Remember, you don't have to handle everything. Family or friends can take on certain tasks to free up your time.
- **Schedule “Me Time” Daily:** Even 5-10 minutes of a favorite activity can make a difference—listen to a podcast, go for a quick walk, or read.
- **Professional Support:** Consider seeing a therapist who understands caregiver stress.

TIP: Make a list of “go-to” self-care activities so that you can refer to it quickly when you're feeling overwhelmed.

SELF-CARE STRATEGIES FOR YOUR LOVED ONE

Self-care isn't just for the caregiver; your loved one with aphasia also needs time to relax and recharge. Here are some strategies tailored to them:

- **Identify Triggers:** Work together to identify overstimulating situations, like loud gatherings or crowded rooms.
- **Schedule Quiet Time:** Set aside time each day for rest, whether it's quiet reading, listening to music, or sitting outside.
- **Engage in Physical Activity:** Simple movements, even just stretching, can reduce stress.
- **Mindfulness Practice:** Use apps or simple breathing exercises to calm the mind, especially helpful before or after events.

HOLIDAY SELF-CARE

GROUNDING FOR CALMNESS (EVEN IF IT FEELS A LITTLE "WOO WOO")

Okay, maybe it feels a little 'woo woo,' but trust me—there's something powerful about reconnecting with nature!

Here's what I do: I slip my bare toes into the grass, take a deep breath, and let it all go for a moment.

Just breathe, release, breathe. Find something small and beautiful—a tree, a bird, even the way the light hits the leaves. Let yourself notice it fully. Imagine each breath helping you release what's been weighing on you, bit by bit.

No shoes? No grass? Even standing still outside for a few moments can help. The goal is to reconnect, breathe, and let go.

Quick Grounding Prompt

What did you notice? How did it feel to release the day's weight, even if just for a moment?

CAREGIVER AND LOVED ONE SELF-CARE ACTIVITIES

Self-care can also be shared. Here are a few ideas to foster well-being together:

- **Listen to Music:** Pick a relaxing playlist, holiday music, or songs with positive memories and play them during meals or downtime.
- **Nature Walks:** For a peaceful reset, you can take a short walk, sit in a park, or even watch nature from indoors.
- **Wi-Fi Bird Feeder:** Purchase a birdfeeder with a camera and enjoy the birds from wherever you are.
- **Engage in Simple Crafts or Games:** Play a low-stress game, complete a puzzle, or work on a craft—anything that helps you unwind together.
- **Practice Gratitude:** Take turns sharing something you're thankful for, whether it's about the holiday or just daily life.

HOLIDAY SELF-CARE

RECOGNIZING YOUR WORTH AND SETTING BOUNDARIES

The demands of caregiving can sometimes make you forget your own worth. Here are some tips to remember that your health and happiness matter:

- **Set Boundaries:** Know your limits and communicate them. It's okay to say no to extra tasks if it means preserving your well-being.
- **Practice Flexibility:** Sometimes plans change, and that's okay. Adapt without judgment—self-care is a journey, not a strict plan.
- **Create Healthy Relationships:** Surround yourself with supportive people who understand and uplift you.
- **Challenge Limiting Beliefs:** Self-care is not selfish. Recognize and challenge any thoughts that make you feel guilty for taking time to recharge.

REFLECTION

Use these questions to reflect on your self-care practices, making adjustments if necessary:

What does self-care mean to you during the holidays?

When was the last time you took time for yourself?

What are two small self-care practices you can add to your day-to-day?

What boundary would help you this season?

HOLIDAY SELF-CARE

QUICK TIPS FOR PRACTICING SELF-CARE DURING THE HOLIDAYS

- **Use the “5-Minute Rule”:** Commit to just 5 minutes of a self-care activity each day. Small moments add up.
- **Share Your Needs:** Let your family or guests know if you need quiet time, and build it into your holiday planning.
- **Find a Relaxing Corner:** Designate a quiet area in the house where you or your loved one can go for a quick break.
- **Give Yourself Permission:** It’s okay to adjust expectations. Your well-being is a priority.
- **Try Grounding Exercises:** Step outside and feel the ground under your feet, noticing nature around you to help recenter.

By practicing self-care, you’re giving yourself and your loved one the best chance to fully enjoy the holiday season.

MY SELF-CARE INTENTIONS

Use this list to choose small self-care actions you'd like to practice regularly. Check off those that resonate with you, and revisit as often as needed.

- Take a 5-minute breathing break each day.
- Set aside time to read or listen to a podcast.
- Practice gratitude daily by noting one thing I'm thankful for.
- Step outside for fresh air once a day.
- Reach out to a friend or support group this week.
- Delegate one task to a family member or friend.
- Find a quiet corner for moments of calm during gatherings.

What small practices can I add to my day?

HOLIDAY SELF-CARE

REFLECTION

Is there anything standing in your way of taking care of yourself?

What might help you overcome this?

Can you think of one small action to prioritize self-care, even with this obstacle?

8

Bringing It All Together



Let each holiday teach us something new—celebrate the learning as much as the memories.

CHAPTER 8

You've made it through this workbook, and that's **worth celebrating!** You've explored **valuable strategies** to navigate the holidays, planned for gatherings, and found **meaningful ways to include your loved one** in cherished traditions. Along the way, you've likely **uncovered new insights** about communication, connection, and even self-care—essential to creating a fulfilling holiday season for you and your loved one.

As we approach this journey's end, it's time to bring everything together. This chapter is designed to help you **reflect on your progress, recognize the areas where you've grown, and assess the aspects that might still need attention.** Together, we'll walk through a post-assessment to see how far you've come, and we'll create a personalized action plan for one holiday so you can move forward with confidence and clarity.

Whether it's the upcoming holiday or a gathering in the future, this final section will guide you in refining your holiday approach. You'll leave with a **deeper understanding of what works best for you and your loved one**, and practical steps to make your next holiday experience both joyful and inclusive. Let's dive into this final chapter with pride, knowing that the skills and insights you've gained are setting you up for many meaningful celebrations to come.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

LOOKING BACK AT WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED

Over the past chapters, you've covered various aspects of preparing for the holidays, including:

- **Understanding What Makes Holidays Meaningful:** What traditions, people, and experiences matter most to you?
- **Communication Strategies and Strengths:** What are your loved one's communication strengths, and which strategies will be most helpful?
- **Holiday Vision and Planning:** How do you envision the holiday? What new traditions or adaptations can you introduce?
- **Sharing Communication Strategies with Others:** How can you inform and prepare guests to help your loved one feel included?
- **Hosting Alternatives:** How can you make hosting easier or delegate responsibilities?
- **Travel and Attending Gatherings:** What steps will you take to ensure smooth travel and enjoyable gatherings?
- **Self-Care for You and Your Loved One:** How will you prioritize your well-being throughout the holiday season?

REFLECTION

What 3 lessons from this workbook were most impactful for you? Why?

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

REVISITING YOUR NOTES

Go back to your notes from each chapter and highlight the key points. As you read, reflect on:

- What ideas felt most helpful?
- Where did you feel stuck, and what helped you move forward?
- Which action steps are you excited to implement?

TIP: Don't just glance at your notes—take time to review them thoughtfully. Make any adjustments as needed based on your reflections.

Key Takeaways

RATE YOUR PROGRESS

Let's revisit the self-assessment questions from Chapter 1, using the same 5-point happy face scale (from red to green). This time, reflect on the progress you've made since starting the workbook.

I understand what matters most during the holidays.



I know my loved one's communication strengths and can use strategies to help.



I feel prepared to adjust holiday traditions and introduce new ideas.



I know how to share communication strategies with others effectively.



I have a clear plan for hosting, traveling, or attending gatherings.



I feel confident about my ability to make self-care a priority.



I feel ready to handle unexpected challenges during the holidays.



BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

REFLECTION

What surprised you about this process?

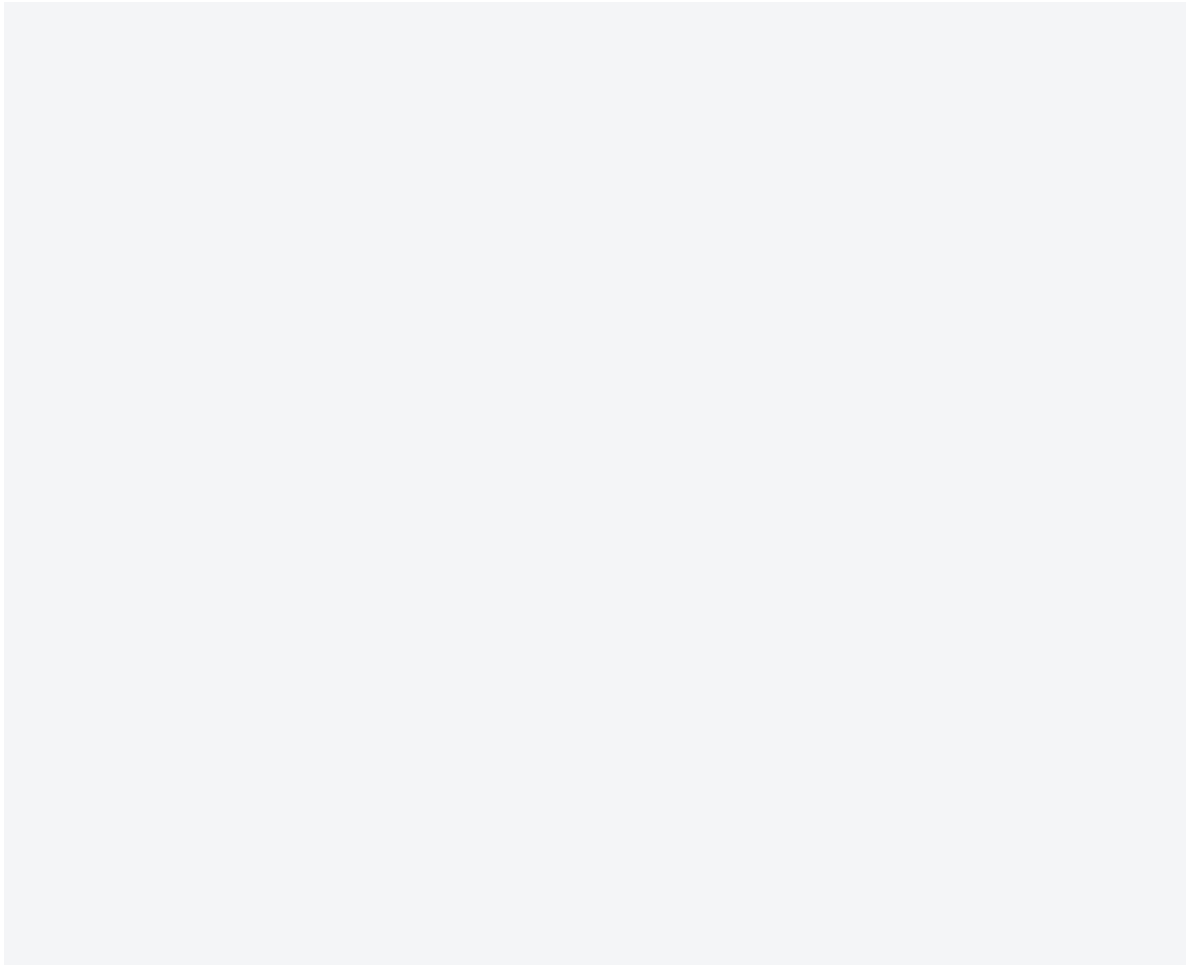
Which strategies or tools were most helpful, and why?

What still feels challenging, and how will you address it?

CREATING AN ACTION PLAN FOR ONE HOLIDAY

Step 1: Review Your Top Takeaways

Write down the top strategies or lessons that resonated with you from each chapter. Use these insights to build your action plan in the space below.



BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Step 2: Set Your Priorities

Identify the most important aspects for the holiday.

What matters most to you and your loved one?

Which traditions will you keep, adapt, or introduce?

How will you prepare others to help your loved one feel included?

Step 3: Outline Your Holiday Plan

Break down the plan into manageable steps:

Pre-Holiday Preparation: List tasks for planning, communication, and gathering any supplies.

During the Holiday: Outline key activities, moments for breaks, and how to support your loved one.

Post-Holiday Reflection: Plan time to review how things went and make notes for future holidays.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Step 4: List Potential Challenges and Backup Plans

Think about what might go wrong and how you'll address it. Consider:

Plan A: What's your ideal plan?

Plan B: How will you adjust if things don't go as expected?

TIP: "Be flexible. It's okay to change plans as needed to prioritize well-being and connection."

REFLECTION

How do you feel about your holiday plan? What adjustments can you make to be better prepared?

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

As you wrap up this workbook, take a moment to appreciate your journey. You've spent time reflecting, adapting, and planning purposefully.

This chapter combines everything you've learned, empowering you to approach the holidays with clarity, readiness, and the flexibility to adapt to whatever comes your way.

Your commitment to making this season inclusive and fulfilling reflects the love and resilience that drives you, and that is a gift in itself. With your action plan in hand and the insights you've gained, you're not just prepared for one holiday, you're equipped for many more meaningful moments ahead. Embrace this holiday season knowing that you've done the work to create a truly connected experience for yourself and your loved one.

9

Next Steps



The journey of inclusion doesn't end
with one season. Keep learning,
keep connecting.

LET'S REVIEW

You've made real progress. Before we look ahead, take a moment to notice how far you've come.

When you first opened this book, the holidays might have felt uncertain. Maybe you weren't sure what to say or how to help your person feel included. And yet, you showed up. You wanted something different. You wanted connection, confidence, and joy to return to your family. That choice matters.

Along the way, you've begun shifting from protecting to including. You've practiced slowing down, giving time, using choices, writing key words, and celebrating shared moments instead of perfect ones. You've learned that helping doesn't mean taking over—and that confidence, for both of you, grows when you act as partners instead of protector and patient.

Take a breath and let that truth settle in. What you've started isn't temporary, it's the beginning of something steady and strong.

So how do you keep it going?

That's what the next few pages are about. Ways to stay encouraged, keep learning, and build the structure that helps your progress last.

NEXT STEPS

WATCH & LEARN WITH US: LIFE BEYOND APHASIA

You don't have to do this alone. Real families are walking this same path, finding new ways to include, connect, and rebuild daily life after aphasia.

The **LIFE Beyond Aphasia** YouTube Channel brings these stories to life with short, practical episodes that pair with this book. You'll see real care partners using the same tools you've practiced here. Slowing down, offering choices, and celebrating connection over perfection.

Start with the Holiday Inclusion Playlist. It's designed to help you put these ideas into action with simple, everyday examples you can watch and try right away

Subscribe for ongoing encouragement, stories, and new ways to make inclusion part of everyday life.

Visit youtube.com/@LifeBeyondAphasia
or **scan the QR code**



NEXT STEP: BUILD THE STRUCTURE THAT LASTS

You've started something powerful. The shift from protection to inclusion. Now it's time to build the structure that helps it last.

That's what we've created inside the **LIFE Aphasia Collective™**. A community built for care partners who are ready to move from surviving to steady, confident progress.

Inside, you'll learn how to keep communication growing and create daily routines that bring you back into shared rhythm. No more guessing. No more trial and error.

We've mapped the path and would love for you to walk it with us.

Visit lifeaphasiaacademy.co/life-aphasia-collective or scan the QR code.



NEXT STEPS

THANK YOU

Inclusion doesn't stop when the decorations come down. The real celebration is daily life. The quiet mornings, the routines that slowly rebuild connection.

Keep practicing:

- Choose one routine each week to make inclusive.
- Keep your Conversation Pieces visible.
- Revisit the 3-Step Inclusion Framework until it feels natural.

Inclusion isn't about big events, it's built in small, consistent moments of belief and partnership. Each time you slow down, give space, or invite your person to lead, confidence and connection grow on both sides.

If you ever need more support along the way, the LIFE Aphasia Collective™ community is here with training, templates, resources, guidance, and understanding.

Thank you for believing that connection is worth rebuilding. You are the bridge between isolation and belonging.

With gratitude,

Genevieve

WHEN APHASIA ENTERS YOUR FAMILY, CONNECTION CAN DISAPPEAR

After aphasia, survivors often hide—not from you, but from the confusion that follows when others don't understand. Care partners, unsure what to do, start protecting. Speaking for, doing for, or quietly avoiding what feels hard. Holidays shrink. The world gets smaller.

That's why this book exists. Aphasia-Inclusive Celebrations shows you how to move from protecting to including using simple, evidence-based tools to help your loved one lead, participate, and belong again. With intention and practice, every gathering can become a bridge back to life beyond aphasia.

*Connection doesn't disappear after aphasia,
it just needs a new way forward.*



Families are asked to do everything, yet rarely given the tools or structure to succeed. The result is burnout, disconnection, and living in survival mode.

Through LIFE Speech Pathology®, LIFE Aphasia Academy®, and LIFE Aphasia Collective™, Genevieve has built a system that changes that. One that equips care partners with the training, strategies, and support they need to move from caregiver to care partner.

With more than 30 years in adult aphasia rehabilitation, she has seen how understanding, structure, and partnership transform recovery. When care partners are equipped and confident, both people find their way back to connection, purpose, and life beyond aphasia.

No more guessing. No more trial and error. We've mapped the path. Walk it with us inside LIFE Aphasia Collective™.
Scan the QR to learn more!