

Verbal Memory Checklist

Learning and memory are very closely connected. Learning is the process by which new information or skills are acquired. Memory is the process by which that knowledge is stored and recalled for later use. Memory is essential to all learning because it allows you to store and retrieve information that is learned.

- Forgets to take meds at prescribed times
- Does not keep scheduled appointments
- Does not follow through on stated plans or activities
- Can't seem to remember to do something that would help with remembering (e.g. Forgetting to set the alarm, or bringing a watch or a bus schedule)
- Misplaces things
- Loses track of money
- Forgets important dates like birthdays etc
- Asks people to repeat things frequently
- Asks the same question again and again
- Gets lost travelling – forgets directions
- Can't seem to retain info after reading something
- Forgets names
- Doesn't seem to learn things as quickly as before
- Can't recall what happened at meetings with other people
- Can't recall what was discussed at a meeting
- Doesn't remember the characters in a show
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The checklist can also identify strengths – support and praise those strengths

Helping Others Deal with Verbal Memory Problems

Memory actually consists of both learning and recalling information. Try to devise and enlist strategies that address both learning and retrieval. The following are a few suggestions but actually the list is only restricted by our creativity.

Before beginning, it should be ensured that both client and clinician have a shared understanding about the presence of a problem, that they agree on what aspects of the problem they will address and that they have sufficient rapport to work as partners on the problems

Avoid Distractions

When trying to remember something, it is important to pay attention to the source of the information. Strategies such as being in a quiet environment, focusing on one thing at a time, and minimizing the number of people in a conversation can help.

Repetition

Information or instructions may be repeated over and over. If the parties all know why they are repeated then it is less likely to lead to tension.

Repetition can tie into the person's preferred learning style. Not only can the information come in different formats but it can be repeated at differing times or circumstances – i.e. those which the person may find facilitates learning and memory.

Developing habits/routines can also help people remember and practice what they have learned in a consistent way (e.g., keeping one's keys in the same spot at home).

Learning small bits and then building on those as they are mastered involves repetition. It also helps avoid the problems some people have learning by the method of corrective feedback.

As therapists you are all familiar with "Rogerian" or "Active" listening. This technique is a powerful learning mechanism. Have a person paraphrase what you said. Try to allow them to get the big picture out and do not jump in correcting the details. Encourage and praise attempts at paraphrasing. After a time, ask if a repetition might help and then do so while watching to see if the

person is showing signs of recognizing the information as it is re-presented. It is a lot easier to recognize than remember information.

Encourage persons to use the technique outside of the therapy sessions and review its impact on social interactions.

Finally, reinforce that it is OK to ask someone to repeat what they have said. Einstein was said to have said something like; "Forgive me but could you repeat that? I never quite understand something the first time I hear it".

Multimodal Presentations

Simply saying something may be a poor way to help someone learn. It may be easier for a person to learn if the information is presented visually rather than verbally.

Doing rather than listening is an effective way to learn.

Encourage a person to put things into writing – and review it so everyone is assured that what was written is correct

Similarly, when trying to remember something visual (e.g., where you parked the car), it may help to make an effort to think about it using words as well (e.g., "the car is parked on the 3rd floor to the right of the mall entrance").

Use of Cues

Persons can employ mnemonics or other cues to facilitate learning and recall. Mnemonics are a group of words or letters that help you remember more detailed information. For example, the mnemonic "Never Eat Shredded Wheat" is often used by students to remember the order of directions on a compass.

Remembering to remember is a frequent problem. If a person forgets to set their alarm clock then what can they do to get reminded to set it? (hint: a wrist watch alarm or mobile phone can be used to cue someone to do something - like look in a daytimer)

Adaptive Reminder Techniques

Use a daytimer, mobile phone or computer calendar and write/speak/type in it every day no matter how trivial the entries or reminders may seem. Diaries may also be used to help consolidate learning and provide "an external memory bank"

Pill containers – these have been a boon in recent years
Lists and Sticky notes are other standbys