



SIMPLE SHIFT

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I have been a speech pathologist for the past 20 years. Although I took a stuttering class in graduate school, I still felt unprepared to handle stuttering children. I was taught that indirect therapy was best, and not to mention the word stutter.

Recently, I attend a conference where I learned so much more about stuttering. Dr. Scott Yaruss opened my eyes about stuttering. I learned that it is more than just all right to use the word stuttering, it is our responsibility to be open and honest about it! People who stutter know that they are stuttering. It is not news to them; they've known since an early age.

This new insight came at the perfect time for me. Two new students, both in kindergarten, in the same class, found themselves on my caseload and both were stutterers. I used the new information that I had learned during the conference and began a whole different course of therapy, one that talked openly about stuttering and what it meant to these two young boys. The difference is amazing.

For so long, stuttering made me uncomfortable because I felt so compelled to "fix" the problem. The truth is there is no simple "fix" (which is a true statement for any speech and language difficulty or delay). What is far more important is to help these students be more comfortable with their speech, and to help them learn to be effective communicators even if they do stutter. That simple shift in my own thinking has led to unbelievable results. I see the structure of confidence being built in every session with these young boys. Stuttering therapy can be a rewarding part of our clinical practice, sometimes it just takes opening ourselves up to new ideas and really understanding what our goals are for our clients. ☺

THE ART OF RECOVERY

By Tim Mackesey, CCC-SLP, BCS-F

We've recently finished the summer Olympics in Rio, and one of the things to marvel over is how athletes recover after a very public disaster. Imagine a gymnast who has trained 12 years for this moment on the balance beam and she falls! 20,000 in the audience gasp all at once, 250 million at home watch it, and her coaches and teammates are counting on her to do her best. What does the gymnast do? She shakes it off immediately, re-mounts the beam, completes her routine, dismounts, throws back her arms with pride, and acts as though she never fell! She has to forgive herself immediately because she has move on other routines. Ice skaters have a similar champion mentality: get up and finish with pride even when hurt. When you add in a missed putt in golf, a strike out in baseball, and other critical sports situations you can create countless moments with potential humiliation.

If I stutter with a few witnesses, do I have to freak out and dwell on it for years to come? I had a severe stutter for more than 20 years. I used to think of some of my stutters as catastrophic. For example, if I stuttered alone in my car at a drive-thru window, I would beat myself up for months, or even years. Doing self-therapy as an adult I had to "edit and delete" all my old humiliating memories of teasing, avoidance, and the like. I had to learn to recover.

One of the most difficult things for a person who stutters (PWS) is being able to recover after an embarrassing stuttering event. Specific word fears and situation phobias are a result of dwelling on the stuttering event. Somatic memory is the memory that you can feel long after it happens; you might feel it in your chest and stomach. Many PWS fear saying their name, hometown, job title, school, or similar commonly spoken words. What does it take to remember to stutter on those words? It seems that the more we

try not to stutter, the more we do. I once helped a 55-year old who vividly described stuttering on his name 49 years earlier, at age six, in school! Speaking at the NSA convention in July 2016 I asked for a show of hands for PWS who remembered stutters from 5, 10, 15, 20, and even 20+ years earlier. Hands were up all over the room.

Many people who stutter report that using targets and fluency techniques are useless when they are anxious, nervous, or fearful. How do we know to fear stuttering? What if we stutter? State anxiety, social phobia, and anticipatory anxiety are often used as terms to describe the fear of stuttering. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is often vital to a truly integrated approach to speech therapy.

Starkweather and Givens* contributed a spot-on article entitled Stuttering as a Variant of PTSD. The authors explained how a person who stutters remembers past stuttering events, feels dissociation during stuttering events, and then anticipates and fears future speaking events. This highlights the phenomena of remembering stuttering events and attaching feelings.

When a PWS punctuates a stuttering event with shame, embarrassment, and the like it is stored away into memory. You might say that we then have 'malware' or a virus on our 'mental computer'. The Meta-Model** can help us to understand the specific cognitive distortions connected to this thing called stuttering.

*2003 ISAD on-line conference. www.stutteringhomepage.com

** Bandler, Richard & John Grinder (1975a). *The Structure of Magic I: A Book About Language and Therapy*. Palo Alto, CA: Science & Behavior Books.

A PERSON WHO STUTTERS SHOULD ASK HIM OR HERSELF:

WHAT DO I BELIEVE ABOUT STUTTERING?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ME WHEN I STUTTER?

IS IT A PROBLEM FOR ME IF I STUTTER?

A PWS must attach meaning to the stuttering event to dwell on it, right? Otherwise, it would be forgotten.

HERE ARE 5 POINTERS FOR SELF-EXAMINATION TO REDUCE ANXIETY:

- 1 Examine & eliminate the beliefs, projecting, & personalizing that is responsible for anxiety & fear
- 2 Open up & mention that you stutter (some call this 'advertising')
- 3 Try using pseudo-stutters (fake stutters) that feel meaningless
- 4 Attend a support group for stuttering &/or engage in an integrated model of speech therapy that includes CBT
- 5 Forgive yourself if you stutter, recover fast, & remember the athletes who rebound immediately in front of massive crowds