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**Share. Learn. Grow.**

NOTE: Please use this stuttering support meeting guide to engage members in stimulating conversation. Revise, copy, etc as needed from this editable Word format. This is not WSN *proprietary information.*

**1.*Eye of the Beholder***

Why is eye contact so hard to maintain while stuttering?

**Group discussion questions:**

* Is it difficult to maintain eye contact when stuttering? Why do you think that is?
* Does it help your stuttering if you maintain eye contact?

**Group activity:**

As PAIRS:

* Split into pairs
  + - Maintain strict eye contact *while remaining silent*for 2 minutes (*focus on relaxing and making the other person comfortable*)
    - Switch partners

As a GROUP

* + - Take turns standing in front of the group in complete *silence*
    - Audience maintains strict eye contact with the person in front
    - Person in front gives eye contact to each person.
    - *FEEL no pressure to speak. FEEL the connection between you and your audience.*

**Activity questions:**

* Do you find it uncomfortable to maintain eye contact? Why? How did you feel?
* Did you feel a gradual connection to the person you were giving eye contact to?

**Support Group Challenge:**

Give intentional eye contact during the next month, especially when stuttering. Tell us about your experience at our next meeting.

NOTE: The above is based on the ground-breaking concept ***Speaking Circles*** by John Harrison.

**2. Leaders Who Stutter (LWS)**

Throughout history, stutterers have demonstrated leadership in the political arena, business world, educational settings and many other valuable

**Group Discussion:**

* Think of a high-quality leader that you know. Someone who does or does not stutter. They can be someone you know personally or someone in the public eye. What qualities do they possess that make them a good leader?
* What qualities indicate that someone is not yet ready to be a leader of others? How might that change? Is everybody meant to be a leader?
* What are the obstacles a person who stutters encounters when they are seeking or already in a position of leadership?
* What are the first steps a person can take to grow their leadership skills? Think about local community groups, sports, support groups, etc.
* How do we help children and teens who stutter feel eligible to seek positions of leadership?
* What responsibilities does a LWS have to the stuttering community, if any?

**Group Activity**

* “The pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects it to change. The leader adjusts the sails.” John Maxwell
* What does this quote mean to you?
* Watch this video.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTRAripodJY>
* What leadership qualities are visible in the speaker?
* What part of his speech was memorable to you?
* How did his stuttering improve the quality of his story? the interest of his listeners?

**3. *Speaking UP***

It's easy to keep quiet when you stutter. Not asking a question, missing an opportunity, or even being taken advantage of might seem better than stuttering. But . . . is this the *BEST*way to live?

**Group questions:**

* How many of us had an occasion TODAY that we wished we would have said something but didn't? What happened?
* How many of us had an occasion TODAY that we spoke up when we didn't have to? Why did you speak up?
* Each attendee tells the group of a **pivotal** time in their life when they **DIDN'T** speak up.
  + Was it because of ***stuttering*** or the ***possible consequence***of what they wanted to say?
* Each attendee tells the group of a **pivotal** time in their life when they **DID**speak up.
  + Did you stutter? If yes, did it affect the outcome?
  + How did you feel afterwards?
* **Can you be assertive and stutter?**Why or why not?

**Group activity:**

* Watch this 38 second video together.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4ACeoqEjeA>

* Stand in a circle.
* Feel the Power Pose
* Go around the circle and say something. Say anything.
* Feel the Power Pose.
* Repeat.

**Support Group Challenge**

Be assertive and speak up one time during this next month while in your Power Pose. Tell us about your experience at our next meeting.

**4. *Help!***

How many times have you heard:

"*Just stop and take a breathe..*."

"*Relax and slow down...*"

And the ALL TIME favorite, "*Did you forget your name???"*

**Group discussion questions:**

* What are common sayings when people try to help us?
* Has anyone tried to make you feel at ease by joking about stuttering? How did that make you feel?
* What do you do when people finish your word or sentence?
* Do people NOT involve you in activities or conversations because they think stuttering embarrasses you?

**Group activity:**

*BEST* response!

* + Break into pairs and figure out the **best**response to these common sayings:
    - * *"Just stop and breathe...."*
      * *"Relax and slow down...."*
      * *"Do you stutter?"*
      * *"Are you nervous?"*
      * *"Are you telling the truth?"*
      * *"Did you forget your name?"*

**Support Group Challenge:**

Put this advice to use in the next month and tell us how it goes.

**5. Does Typing *HELP* Stuttering?**

Advancements in technology have enabled many stutterers to experience greater freedom of expression. Digital voices can be very powerful and fulfilling. But does increased reliance on this form of communication *help* or *harm* one's stuttering?

**Group discussion questions:**

* How have advancements in technology helped you to communicate?
* Do you talk person-to-person less?
* Does heavy use of digital communication effect your stuttering? e.g. The more you text, the more you stutter?
* How has digital communication effected your career? Has it changed what and how you do it?
* Overall, has technology made life with stuttering better?

**Group activity:**

* With emoticons or texting shorthand, tell another member a short story or message.
* Receiving member conveys the story or message to the group.
* This is wild fun!

**Support Group Challenge:**

Each member makes one phone call instead of texting during the next month. Tell us about the experience at the next meeting.

**6. Being an Effective Communicator**

There is more than one way to be an engaging, enjoyable, effective communicator… with or without a stutter.

**Group Discussion**

* What is the difference between effective communication and fluency?
* Can you be an effective communicator if you stutter? How?
* Are all fluent people good communicators? Why or why not?
* How would a person’s quality of life change if he/she focused on making their message known rather than fluency? How might it change their participation in conversation?

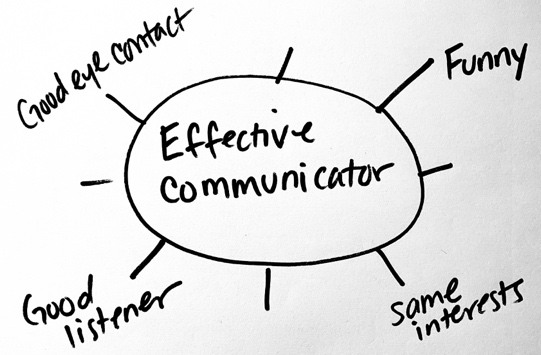
**Group Activity**

*Make a Word Map!*

* Get a whiteboard or piece of paper.
* Draw a circle in the middle. Write the word “Effective Communicator” in the middle of the circle.
* Ask group members to think of someone they know who is an effective communicator (e.g., if at a party, you would sit next to him/her; if he/she was giving a lecture, you would probably go; if you wanted to talk to someone, you would think of him/her.)
* Ask group members to list characteristics of the person they have in their minds. Go around the group listing characteristics while writing them down on the word map.
* Discuss how many characteristics are unrelated to fluency.

**Support group Challenge**

Notice the speaking habits of people around you throughout your day. Take stock of your own conversational habits that lend to effective communication. What qualities do you value? What would you like to change/improve for yourself?

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**7. Do you have a *secret* Stutter?**

How many know what ***covert stuttering***means? How would you explain it?

Common explanations:

*Attempting to pass as fluent.*

*Hiding your stutter*

*Refusal to acknowledge your stutter*

**Group discussion questions:**

* Do you openly talk about your stuttering?
* Did/does your family talk about your stuttering?
* Do people at work know you stutter? If not, would stuttering be a detriment to your career?
* Do your friends know you stutter? If so, do you talk about it with them?
* Do you tell strangers that you stutter? i.e. having difficulty ordering food
* Is it *more* stressful hiding your stutter than being open about stuttering?

**Group activity:**

*Covert stuttering* is based on fear. How many fears can we list regarding stuttering?

**Support Group Challenge:**

Tell one new person each week for the next month that you stutter or bring up stuttering in a conversation. Tell us about your experience(s) at our next meeting.

**8. Stutterer vs. Person Who Stutters (PWS)?**

Different people use different terms to describe those who stutter.

What do you say?

**Group Discussion**

* In the 1990s, there was a change in the United States to use person-first language (e.g., person who…). Why do you think this came about? What did it intend to accomplish?
* Is the change in language designed to be more respectful or politically correct? Or both? How much does it make a difference?
* Disability advocates promoted the concept that a person shouldn’t be defined by a diagnosis. By literally putting “person” first in language, what was once a label becomes a mere characteristic. Do you think it makes a difference? Does it lessen or increase stigma? Why or why not?
* If we only use person-first language with people who have disabilities, are we then highlighting the disability? For example, we say *athlete*  and *artist,* not *person who is athletic* and *person who is artistic.*
* If we choose NOT to define stuttering as a disability, but rather a different way of speaking, does that impact your terminology?

**Group Activity**

1. Give everyone a piece of paper.
2. Draw a line down the middle.
3. In one column, write the heading “PWS”. In the other column, write the heading “Stutterer.”
4. Write down the pros and cons about each.

Kathie Snow, a disability rights advocate, stated that “labels have always caused people to be de-valued.”

“It’s not really about sensitivity,” says Kenneth St. Louis, a stutterer. “It’s about: This is just the way it’s done.” Furthermore, suggests St. Louis, the sentiment expressed in communication is far more important than the linguistic circumlocutions present in the language. “If you are going to be a jerk,” he says, “you can be just as much of a jerk using person-first language as using the direct label.” (Collier, 2012)

**9. "Yes, I Stutter."**

Disclosure, self-advocacy, advertising? Whatever you call it.

Telling others that you stutter.

**Group discussion questions:**

* Do you tell new people that you stutter?
* When you first start talking? Or during the conversation?
* How do you tell them?
* Do you stutter MORE after people know you stutter?
* How do most people react when you tell them that you stutter?
* Do you feel more at ease after people know you stutter?
* Does anyone have a humorous way to tell people they stutter?

**Group activity:**

Each attendee fills in the blanks and reads them to the group:

* + - "Yes, I stutter."
    - "Yes, I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"
    - "Yes, I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"
    - "Yes, I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"
    - "Yes, I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"

*We do MANY things besides stutter.*

**Support Group Challenge:**

Tell at least one new person this month that you stutter. Share your experience at our next meeting.

**10. *Dating & Relationships as a Stutterer***

*"Should I?" "What if?"* and countless other relationship questions. How do you find a partner if you stutter?

**Group discussion questions:**

*For those dating:*

* + Do you tell him/her that you stutter before the first date?
  + Do you talk about stuttering on the date?
  + Have you been rejected because of stuttering? How did you cope?
  + How do most dates react when you tell them that you stutter?

*For those in a relationship:*

* + How did you meet? What part did stuttering play in dating?
  + Does stuttering come up in everyday life?
  + Does your partner support & understand your stutter?

*For those with children:*

* + Did you have any fears that your children would stutter? If yes, how did you work through?
  + Does anyone have children who stutter? How are they coping?
  + Do your children understand your stuttering? How did you explain it to them when they were young?

**Group activity:**

* What would you say to your younger self about dating & relationships?

**Support Group Challenge:**

* Ask you partner to write a paragraph to share with the group about your stuttering. Share at the next meeting.
* For those dating, tell one potential date that you stutter before the first date, then tell us how that played out.

**11. Are Stutterers Good Listeners???**

*"My stuttering makes me a good listener."*

Have you heard that, or even said it yourself?

Does stuttering **naturally** make us a *better* listener?

**Group discussion questions:**

* Are YOU a good listener? Or are you typically focused on starting your next sentence?
* Some start their sound based on the rhythm of another speaker. This may seem like interrupting them. Do you start your sentence while another person is talking?
* Have you ever blocked on your sentence, someone else begins talking, and then when you begin your sentence it seems like you're overtalking the speaker?
* Do you appear as a good listener, when in reality you don't want to talk because of stuttering?
* Some have likened speaking in a group conversation like jumping rope as you try to catch the rhythm. Have you felt this? How do you join a fast-paced group conversation?

**Group activities:**

"NEXT WORD"**:**

* Have fun while telling a story as a group!
* Each person says a word
* Take turns in a clockwise direction
* Each person must listen carefully as they try to make the story make sense or insert humor

"STORY PARTNERS"

* Pick two volunteers.
* Each person says a sentence as part of an overall story.
* Challenge the other person by giving them a difficult sentence to follow.

"90 SECOND SHARE"

* Break into partners.
* Leader gives a topic to discuss.
* The duo talks for about 90 seconds (or longer, if desired).
* At the end, turn back to the group. Share something YOUR PARTNER said about the topic.

***ALL games are wildly fun and bring much laughter to the meeting!***

**Support Group Challenge:**

Encourage the quieter members to talk more by giving them space with 'group pauses'. Members who tend to be more vocal can practice ***active listening skills*** with those who don't talk as much.

**12. *Backfire Effect***

Dartmouth College published a research study based on the futility of arguing belief. They concluded the other person is rarely convinced they're wrong . . . instead, their belief becomes STRONGER. Their research paper is titled *The Backfire Effect.*

**Group questions (*without debate; just listen*):**

* Have you ever had a disagreement about stuttering? Tell us about it.
* What do you most *disagree* with about stuttering perceptions? What do you most *agree* with?
* How many different schools of thought about stuttering can we identify?
* How important is it to support the views & positions of others relating to stuttering?
* BONUS QUESTION: Is it anyone's right to tell another person how to stutter? Why or why not?

**Group activity:**

"Stutter Like ME" *Third Person View*

Ask each person in the group:

* + - "If another person stuttered like YOU, tell us five ways they handle stuttering in everyday life."
    - "If another person stuttered like YOU, what would they believe about stuttering?"
    - "If another person stuttered like YOU, would they want to improve their speech or be content as is?"

**Support Group Challenge**

What is the mission statement of your organization? Read it at the beginning of your next meeting.

Don't have one? Everyone bring a thought(s) about what your group's mission statement should include. Create one.