

**PEER COUNSELING AND SELF HELP GROUP
FACILITATION
FOR
PEOPLE WHO STUTTER**

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**"if we were to fully recognize that all we have is this
moment, there would be no alternative but attention,
kindness and the capacity to let go."**

Barbara Gates, Editor, *Inquiring Mind*

**"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If
you want to be happy, practice compassion."**

Dalai Lama

FOREWORD

When Michael Sugarman asked us to write the foreword for his "Peer Counseling and Self Help Group Facilitation" manual, significantly it was at a Special Interest Division on Fluency conference entitled, "Bridging the Gap." As builders of this bridge between professionals and consumers, we are pleased to offer our enthusiastic endorsement of it.

Self-help groups for people who stutter are thirty years old now, but rarely has such a comprehensive program been put forward for these groups to follow on a systematic basis. Allowing, as it does, for the person who stutters to come to terms with his/her stuttering, and to choose a direction he/she wants to go in dealing with the problem.

Each of the two major sections; Chapter 1: Peer Counseling Skills and Chapter 2: Self Help Group, are broken down into clearly stated topics that are explored on a meeting-by-meeting basis in an atmosphere of honesty and openness. The peer counselor's job, a key component in any group setting, is especially well described.

The peer counseling and self help group facilitation manual presented here is well thought through, starting with peer counseling skills. These skills set-up the structure allowing the techniques and principles used by the peer counselor to be effective in reaching the topic goals. The description of the peer counselor is especially important. "Know where you begin and end, and where the member begins and ends," is very helpful for a peer counselor. Respecting and really "hearing" the person who stutters is a significant part of the therapeutic process.

An important value of a self help group for people who stutter is to help that person become more aware of the direction he/she wants to go in dealing with the stuttering. Awareness of the process increases the choices for the person who stutters. Through a self help group such as proposed, people who stutter can experience and get to know the various aspects of their stuttering. A sense of control can begin to be obtained over a given part of stuttering, rather than perceiving it as a powerful single force in control of them.

The suggested topics, the sequence in which they are addressed, and appropriate setting of boundaries between a self help group and a professional have been achieved. This program can serve as an important bridge for people who stutter to move from where they are to where they want to go.

Jeanna Riley, Ph.D. and Glyn Riley, Ph.D.
California State University, Fullerton
The Center for Children who Stutter

INTRODUCTION

What is peer counseling?

Peer counseling refers to people who stutter helping each other by listening, sharing common experiences, exploring options and giving support. Peer counseling is based on communication, empathy and understanding. People who stutter can provide peer counseling in a variety of settings including one to one or in a self help group.

What happens in a self help group?

When people who stutter meet together in a self help group, it is often helpful to have a peer counselor who can help the group in a variety of ways. Even though self help groups are not meant to be led by anyone, the peer counselor can assist in creating a safe and comfortable environment, giving all members an opportunity to share and helping individuals better communicate with and listen to each other. A peer counselor assists in setting group goals, develops an agenda and keeps the members on track. He or she can also be a resource for referrals to community services and support networks when the support group is unable to handle a difficult issue or an individual member needs more in depth therapy or professional assistance.

How can I use this manual?

This manual is intended to provide peer counselors involved in self help groups with valuable information to increase their competence in group dynamics and communication skills. It also provides practical information on how to facilitate a self help group, including ideas for agendas and group activities.

How do self help groups and speech therapy work together?

Self help groups are not meant to take the place of speech therapy. While professionals may be able to assist people who stutter in becoming more fluent or developing coping techniques for stuttering, self help groups can provide a safe place where people who stutter are able to share their feelings and know that they are not alone. Self help groups also allow individuals to develop self esteem by helping themselves and others at the same time.

How can I find out more about self help groups?

In addition to this manual, there are numerous books and articles written about self help. Go to your local library or call the American Self Help Group Clearinghouse in your state. See the Reference section of this manual for listings by area.

CHAPTER I: Peer Counseling Skills

- **Essential Concepts in Peer Counseling and Self Help Group Facilitation**
- **Coping as a Peer Counselor and Self Help Group Facilitator**
- **Techniques to Use as a Peer Counselor**

Introduction: Each self help group is different. A peer counselor uses each members unique issues and qualities to make every meeting different and interesting. The flavor of the group depends on the personality of the peer counselor as well as its members'. However, there are some basic concepts and experiences that are common to self help groups. These are shared below.

Shared Experiences: Successful self help group involves shared experiences between the peer counselor and the member. A *PERSON WHO STUTTERS* is the expert on his or her experiences, motivations and feelings. The peer counselor has similar experiences that may help to explore stuttering behavior and personal issues.

Structure: Self Help groups should provide a safe and comfortable opportunity for all members to share ideas and feelings regarding stuttering. Members are encouraged to share their experiences, giving them a better chance to understand each others' feelings and concerns. In order to better facilitate participation, all members must be given an equal opportunity to speak without interruption. Consideration must also be given to the self help group's agenda and keeping on task.

Group Size: The maximum number is more critical than the minimum number for member sharing. Five to seven is a good size; ten should be the upper limit. Ten members divided by an hour of group time works out to six minutes each--not much time for a member to talk about his or her life. However, even when a member is not sharing there is still much learning taking place. The peer counselor may decide to close the self help group meeting to "X" number of participants. Also, when a new member joins the self help group, the peer counselor must set aside time to inform him or her about the rules of the self help group, including confidentiality.

Peer Counselor's Role: Self help group facilitation is the approach taken which calls upon the peer counselor to follow the members' lead as they address issues. Peer counselor can open, maintain and close discussions, and if necessary, remind members that all must have an equal opportunity to share feelings. Peer counselors can also help members explore feelings and behaviors brought up in self help group discussion more deeply.

Context: Peer Counseling efficacy will be improved when peer counselors are able to bring forth and explore the context by which members address personal and stuttering behavior.

Information alone does not lead to behavior change: Behavior change

is a complex process. Providing information as the sole or main intervention is generally not sufficient to lead to changed behaviors.

Neutral stance: It is appropriate for peer counselors to take a neutral stance when addressing ambiguous information from members and to maintain a non-judgmental manner when discussing speech therapy or personal behaviors.

Options: Effective peer counseling offers options not directives.

Feelings are Powerful: Feelings are a powerful part of everyone's experience. The peer counselor cannot take away a person's feelings or "THINK I CAN FIX" another's feelings.

Limitations: It is important for peer counselors to recognize the limitations of their role and act accordingly.

Within the structure of the self help group meeting some things are beyond the scope of the peer counselors experience. Peer counselors need to understand this and be confident he or she can refer the member to appropriate resources.

COPING AS A PEER COUNSELOR AND SELF HELP GROUP FACILITATOR

"Know where you begin and end, and where the member begins and ends".

Take time to assess your own feelings -- think about how feelings affect your peer counseling and your role as a self help group facilitator. For example do they:

- * allow you to feel more genuine?
- * leave you feeling resentful and less willing to provide peer counseling?
- * frighten you?
- * reassure you?
- * make you feel inadequate as a peer counselor?

Recognize signals of stress while in the self help group, such as feeling uncomfortably involved with a member's problems, over-extending yourself beyond the peer role, feeling hopeless or conversely more powerful in a situation than is realistic or appropriate or taking on commitments for members that are beyond appropriate tasks.

Recognize signals of stress beyond the self help group, such as obsessing about family or work or feelings of frustration or disappointment.

Identify resources which support you such as consultation with peers or varying responsibilities in the self help group including sharing facilitation.

TECHNIQUES TO USE AS A PEER COUNSELOR

Listening and communication skills make up the major part of good peer counseling. Below are techniques to use which can improve your listening and communication skills and help you deal with problems which might arise in your self help group. The more you practice, the better you will get at peer counseling.

Open-Ended Questions

You will want to use open-ended questions to keep group conversation moving and probe deeper into topics and feelings raised by self help group members. A "closed" question can be answered with "yes" or "no" or a simple statement of fact. An open ended question requires other information to be answered.

Example:

Closed: "At what age did you first stutter?"

Open: "What was going on in your life when you first started stuttering?"

Benefits of open-ended questions:

- * Reveal deeper and more personal issues
- * Allow for more peer centered support
- * Involve the person who stutters more actively in the self help group

Drawback of open-ended questions:

- * May take more time to get information
- * May open up difficult or challenging issues that are not easily addressed in the self help group.

Active Listening

"Active listening techniques" include engaging and responding to the person who stutters based on something he or she has expressed, either in words, or in non-verbal actions or behavior.

Not recommended:

1. *Repeating words should be used sparingly.* This is not actually an active listening technique. Repeating does not give a person who stutters a sense of being listened to.

Person who stutters: "When I'm about to speak I get excited and stutter. It really upsets me."

Peer Counselor: "This just really upsets you."

Recommended:

2. *Paraphrasing*: Saying what the person who stutters has said, using different words.

Person who Stutters: "When I'm about to speak I get excited and stutter. It really upsets me."

Peer Counselor: "It's very distressing."

3. *Reflecting*: Expanding on the topic, adding in an acknowledgement or exploration of feelings or unstated thoughts.

Person who Stutters: "When I'm about to speak I get excited and stutter. It really upsets me."

Peer Counselor: "Yes, I can see that and I wonder if you might be angry about it, too."

4. *Interest*: Expressing genuine interest in the circumstances of a person who stutters and inviting further disclosure.

Person who Stutters: "When I'm about to speak I get excited and stutter. It really upsets me."

Peer Counselor: "Help me understand what it is like for you when you go through this experience. Can you give me a picture of what a typical stutter would be for you--how you feel when you start thinking about speaking, what happens once you're aware of these thoughts or "how do you feel upset?"

5. *Reframing*: Offering an alternative way of looking at a situation, usually one that is more constructive and positive.

Person who Stutters: "When I'm about to speak I get excited and stutter. It really upsets me."

Peer Counselor: "Yes, you're miles ahead of someone who does not have those feelings and isn't willing to be aware of them. And being upset about your stuttering is a good sign, because it means your instinct to take care of yourself is really kicking in."

6. *Interpretation*: Making some inference that has not been clearly expressed by the person who stutters. This is a more advanced skill, best left to trained professional therapists. Additionally, while interpretation is an important technique in therapy, it has less applicability in the self help group. Even skillful peer counselors usually don't know enough to make successful interpretations. Simply, don't analyze the motivations of others.

Person who Stutters: "When I'm about to speak I get excited and stutter. It really upsets me."

Peer Counselor: Perhaps what is really upsetting you is the guilt and shame you feel about stuttering."

7. *Process*: This skill involves listening, reframing, and expanding what the person who stutters said musing a question.

Person who stutters: "When I'm about to speak I get excited and stutter. It really upsets me."

Peer Counselor: "How come this upsets you?"

Person who stutters: "I feel stupid?"

Peer Counselor: "How come you feel stupid."

Person who stutters: "I really don't know when to start speech therapy?"

Peer Counselor: "You don't quite know how to begin...."

Person who stutters: "I don't know if this group is worth it?"

Peer Counselor: "You feel?"

Person who stutters: "I don't know who is good as a speech therapist?"

Peer Counselor: "You're unsure of the kind of speech therapy you want?"

8. *Attending Behavior*. This skill involves eye contact, posture and verbal and non-verbal cues.

Eye contact may vary from person to person. So a peer counselor can't assume because a person doesn't look you in the eye, that she or he is hiding something.

What posture should a peer counselor take? Whatever posture is comfortable for you. Be you.

Are there verbal and non-verbal cues peer counselor can use? Try "us/huh" "hmmm." Also non-verbal cues are smiling, looking puzzled, nodding, or leaning forward in interest. Be you.

9. *Summation.* This is a combination of one or more phrases and includes a reflection of feelings. A peer counselor ties together content and feelings and tries to put things in perspective and identifies important trends, conflicts and possible decisions. Peer counselors must be aware of the biggest danger: DISTORTION. Therefore, check periodically with your member for accuracy. Also, be prepared to focus on the positive aspects of the situation and don't feed into the negative aspects.

Problem Solving

If a problem arises between group members, here are a few hints for how a peer counselor could handle the situation.

1. Identify feelings of members using the techniques outlined above.
2. Defuse the situation and encourage "airing out" of feelings

A common problem in self help groups is that one group member is especially judgmental or monopolizes the self help group. A peer counselor may follow these suggestions:

1. Talk with the person outside of group about your feelings and perception.
2. Discuss options regarding how to maintain a supportive environment.
3. Come to a joint resolution on how each person is an important support to another

Awareness: Maintain your awareness of feelings. This alone may not be enough to keep difficulties from arising in the meeting.

Observation: Acknowledge the feelings.

Peer Consultation: Share experience with colleagues and express your frustration, as well as gathering information for dealing with such situations.

Mentoring: Share experience with a more experienced colleague especially if there is a continuing issue with an ongoing member.

Referral: If your feelings are strong and interfering with ability to provide "good" peer counseling and after consultation the situation has not improved. Recommendation: Refer this member to another support group, seek professional assistance or ask members' from the self help group a consensus on the situation.

What if a self help group facilitator runs out of things to say?

Let the members lead, and you follow. Check in with members as to how they are feeling or what they want to do next. Remember you are the facilitator, not a group leader and do not need to control the conversation. As a peer counselor, ask questions that may increase knowledge of your members' concerns. Go with the flow of the conversation and avoid changing subjects just to fit into the agenda if the conversation is productive.

CHAPTER II: SELF HELP GROUPS

- **Self Help Group Goals**
- **Self Help Group Ground Rules**
- **Self Help Group Agenda**
- **Self Help Group Activities**

SELF HELP GROUP GOALS

Suggestion: Self help support groups serve a variety of goals. Some of them are listed below. These can range from providing personal support and encouragement to providing advocacy, education and outreach to your local community. You can work with your group to set its own goals.

Teach each other about the dynamics of stuttering

Teach each other about how stuttering affects each one of us

Help members feel better about themselves

Validate members' experiences

Help members identify, understand and express their feelings

Build self confidence and self esteem

Help members build a personal support system

Help members learn how to have fun

Teach stress management techniques

Provide opportunities for members to help their peers

Create a safe place to talk about feelings

Help members identify what they need for themselves

Help members realize that they aren't the only ones with this problem

Strengthen coping skills

Help members find ways to deal with their painful feelings

Help members to trust others and if necessary explore obstacles which inhibit trusting

Encourage intimacy and bonding within the support group

Host workshops

Community outreach regarding stuttering

SELF HELP GROUP GROUND RULES

Here are some basic ideas for ground rules for self help group meetings. You can hand these out at meetings, add to these or develop your own with the group.

Cooperation: Cooperation is essential. Take care of yourself and others. Remember, these are learned skills.

Group safety: Everyone's feelings of safety and comfort are top priorities in the group. "Negative" feelings such as boredom can serve a positive group function if expressed with concern.

Expression of Feelings: To share feelings safely, make "I" statements: "I feel..." or "I want..."

Use of Time: When working on an issue or providing support, be brief and specific. Use the time as efficiently as possible.

Identifying Needs: Learn to identify what you really want: nurturing, support, information, etc. Don't accept help that isn't exactly what you want.

Confidentiality: It is essential that what occurs in the group remains in the group. In practice, there are many limitations to confidentiality, both individual and institutional. It is important that both the principle of confidentiality and the realistic limitations be acknowledged.

Commitment to Change: Work in the self help group is often most effective when it includes a commitment to action to improve oneself. Ask: "What can be done to change the situation?" "How can we help each other?" Where can we go from here?"

Celebration: Give priority self help group time to celebrate success.¹

¹ Adapted from handout "Self Help Group Ground Rules", Support Group Training Project, Oakland, Ca.

SELF HELP GROUP AGENDA

Meeting formats for self help groups range from loosely structured to more formally structured meetings. The following activities are common to many meetings and can be used as a guide for structuring your self help group.

Announcements: Any information about community or national activities is shared with the self help group.

Leftover feelings: Any feelings (appreciations, resentments, fears, etc.) or realizations from the previous meeting are expressed in order to clear away old feelings and enable everyone to be present.

Formal Opening of Meeting: At the agreed upon time, the meeting should be called to order by the facilitator. A welcoming statement such as, "NSP is dedicated to empowering people who stutter to share through self help in a safe and comfortable environment" should be made.

Check-in: Members express how they are feeling (excited, anxious, sad etc.) and whether they wish to use time in the meeting. It is essential that each member check-in with other group members.

Activities/Discussion: At each meeting the peer counselor has two tasks: 1. to facilitate a self help group activity or discussion and 2. to keep time to ensure all members who wish to speak have time to do so.

Wrap-up: The self help group reserves five to ten minutes at the end for closing that includes appreciation and criticism.²

Refreshments can be served at a break or after the meeting, providing time for informal conversation.

² Adapted from "Peer Support Group Structure" Support Group Training Project, Oakland, Ca.

SELF HELP GROUP ACTIVITIES

It often helps if the peer counselor has an activity or discussion topic planned for each meeting. Ideas can come from members or can be taken from the suggestions below. Some of these ideas can be completed in one meeting and others may need to be completed over a series of meetings. If you have other good ideas which have worked in your support group, please send them to: Michael Sugarman, 7626 Valentine St., Oakland, Ca. 94605.

1. **Topic: Introductions**
 Goal: Establish group rapport
 Activity: Getting to know each other

Pair members in the group--preferably with someone they don't know very well and instruct members to ask each other the following questions: Name, when or where you were born? What one word describes you best? How do you feel about your stuttering? What do you like about your stuttering or What does your stuttering show you? What bugs you about your stuttering? Ask members if they want to share what they have learned about the other person.

2. **Topic: Stuttering History**
 Goal: Validate personal experience
 Activity: Discuss my social history

Pass out a piece of paper and markers and give members an entire meeting to draw a chronological history of their lives --from when they were born to the present. This is a time line. Beginning with birth, describe some of your memories relating to your stuttering behavior, describing each situation noting on the time line when it occurred. Members share their time line in the group.

3. **Topic: Personal Awareness**
 Goal: Increase personal awareness
 Activity: Discuss my feelings

A. Begin the meeting by asking members to name as many feelings as they can--such as: A time I felt angry was; A time I felt happy was; A time I felt scared was; A time I felt guilty was; and A time I felt _____ was, etc. and members share.

B. Discuss how you feel when people focus on your stuttering.

C. Discuss a response that a person made about your stuttering and how you responded to him or her.

D. Homework assignment: Keep a journal for one week that focuses on how

you perceive your stuttering in various situations. For example you might use a chart with the following headings: Day/Time; Situation/Setting; Activity; Reactions of other (s); My thoughts and feelings; and Consequences. Have members share their experiences.

E. Discuss three situations where your stuttering stopped you from expressing what you wanted.

4. Topic: Stuttering Information

Goal: Discuss stuttering therapy

Activity: Group discussion about your experiences in speech therapy

A. Members share their experiences from speech therapy.

B. Members share their understanding on the causes of stuttering. Use available resources in your community such as the library, another person who stutters, a speech-language pathologist, or your partner.

5. Topic: Defensiveness

Goal: Identify how you protect yourself from being hurt

Activity: My other side

A. Members share one defense mechanism easy to talk about. Then discuss one defense mechanism difficult to talk about.

B. Ask members to discuss something they have never before disclosed about their stuttering.

C. Discuss how your stuttering affected your expectations in personal relationships, marriage, education and employment opportunities.

6. Topic: Self Esteem

Goal: Increase self esteem

Activity: Discuss me

A. Ask members to discuss their feelings about the following topics: What is my attitude toward and perception of myself? Of me in this group? What is my attitude toward my stuttering? What do I think of myself as a stutterer?

B. Ask members to share their thoughts on self esteem with other members.

C. Using experiences from your life, discuss examples of being passive, being assertive, being powerless and feeling powerful.

D. Ask members to discuss qualities about themselves that increase their self esteem. Members share their qualities.

E. Pass out a piece of paper and pencil and ask members to create a song or a poem for the group on "My self-esteem". After each member reads a song or a poem, the members share the experience.

F. Ask members to discuss personal rights and their importance. Use large newspaper size blank paper. Ask members to create a list of personal rights. Members share their experience.

G. Group members discuss the concept of physical and emotional needs. Ask members to discuss what physical needs he or she may have including, such as food, shelter and clothing. Then discuss what human needs he or she may have in order to be emotionally healthy. These needs can include being loved, giving love, feeling appreciated, and being safe. Ask members to discuss: My Own needs-- Met and Unmet.

H. Ask members to discuss: "shame and self talk." Self talk is the dialogue which goes on in your mind in any given situation.

I. Discuss three personal goals you wish to accomplish and when.

H. At your support group meeting discuss the following handout (copy this page):

"Rules for Being Human: Philosophical Considerations"

You will receive a body. You may like it or hate it, but it will be yours for the entire period this time around.

You will learn lessons. You are enrolled in a full time informal school called life. Each day in this school you will have the opportunity to learn lessons. You may like the lessons or think them irrelevant and stupid.

There are no mistakes, only lessons. Growth is a process of trial and error and experimentation. The "failed" experiments are as much a part of the process as the experiment that ultimately "works".

A lesson is repeated until learned. A lesson will be presented to you in various forms until you have learned it. When you have learned it, you can then go on to the next lesson.

Learning lessons does not end. There is no part of life that does not contain its lessons. If you are alive, there are lessons to be learned.

"There" is no better than "here". When your "there" has become a "here" you will simply obtain another "there" that will again look better than "here".

What you make of your life is up to you. You have all the tools and resources you need. What you make of them is up to you. The choice is yours.

Your answers lie inside you. The answers to life's questions lie inside you. All you have to do is look, listen and trust.

You will forget all this.³

³ Adapted from Handout "Discuss Rules for Being Human" at Care for the HIV Care giver Workshop 4/26/96, East Oakland Recovery Project, Oakland, Ca.

7. Topic: Family Relations

Goal: Increase understanding of family dynamics

Activity: My family relations

A. Pass out a large piece of paper and color markers and ask members to draw expressive faces of each member of their family; partner, children, mother, father and siblings. And then next to each face write down your feelings. Members share what they drew and wrote with the group.

B. Pass out a piece of paper and pencil and ask members to write a letter to parents and/or partner describing how they are affected by stuttering and what they need. These letters are not sent. However, the letters are destroyed in a ritualistic fashion. If members want to share their feelings--they can.

8. Topic: Coping

Goal: Develop coping skills about your stuttering

Activity: How to take care of me

A. Ask members to discuss as specifically as possible how their stuttering bothers them? Then discuss what strengths they may have developed as a result of stuttering.

B. Ask members to role play situations when they did not say meant in order to avoid stuttering. Has anyone been in this type of situation before? Was it difficult or easy to handle? Try to learn to say what you mean. The peer counselor may ask members who agreed to role play to leave the circle to develop a skit for the group. Theatrical props can be used. After the role play members discuss how they can learn to say what they mean.

C. Discuss how your stuttering affects your decisions and whether stuttering interferes with your final decision. For example, talk about jobs, relationships, and social activities.

D. Pass out a piece of paper and pencil and develop a self questionnaire that focuses on: How does stuttering affect me? Share your questions with others in the support group.

9. Topic: Stress

Goal: Teach stress management

Activity: Stress reduction exercises

A. Discuss how stress affects your personal and career life and what activities you do to relieve your stress. Do you consider taking an aerobic exercise class, hiking, challenge yourself in hobbies, social activities or solitary activities? These are just a few. Have each member, who wants to, commit to do something for him/herself to relieve stress during the upcoming week and tell the group what it is.

B. This is for those peer counselors who want to try something that's different for a group activity. Use your community resources and request the following professionals to assist your group:

- * Acupuncturist-- try this eastern health technique for muscle strain, tension reduction, and more
- * Brazilian or Afro-Haitian Dance-- aerobic exercise with a special kick! movements to invigorating music
- * Art Therapy-- access the wisdom of your right brain through an art project
- * Creative Movement-- meditation and movements that help relax and replenish
- * Improvisational Theater-- games and exercises that look at life, relationships and healing
- * Massage and Acupressure-- experience the healing power of massage and learn pressure points to relieve tension
- * Buy a relaxation tape and a book to take members on a visualization exercise.⁴

10. Topic: Letting Go

Goal: Separation

Activity: Letting go of the stutterer

A. Members share their experiences of relapse.

B. On a large piece of paper make two columns. Label one "person who stutters" and the other "stutter." List and discuss whether the two are the same or different.

⁴ Handout from flyer "Care for the HIV Care giver Workshop" 4/26/96, East Oakland Recovery Project

C. Discuss the following statement on "letting go."

To "let go" is not to try to change or blame another,
It's to make the most of myself.

To "let go" is not take care of,
But to care about.

To "let go" is not to judge,
But to allow another to be an imperfect human being

To "let go" is not to be in the middle arranging all the outcomes,
But allowing others to create their own futures.

To "let go" is not to deny, But to accept.

To "let go" is not to adjust everything to my desires, But to take each
day as it comes, and cherish myself in it.

To "let go" is not to criticize and manipulate anyone, But to try to become
the person I am meant to be.

To "let go" is to fear less, and love more.⁵

Members share how "letting go" applies to them.

11. Topic: Support System

Goal: Increase members support system

Activity: You are not alone

A. Pass out a piece of paper and pencil and make a list of your support system.
"Who do I talk to if I have a problem?" "Relapse?" Share your list with
the group. Discuss ways members can increase their support network.


12. Topic: Speaking Circles

Goal: Opportunity to practice speaking in public

**Activity: See Reference section "Speaking Circles Make
Debut at Los Angeles Chapter", *Letting Go* (March/April 1996)**

⁵ Adapted from flyer "Letting Go", Kairos, San Francisco, Ca.

REFERENCES

Self-Help Group Clearinghouses


For help in finding or forming a mutual-help support group for any type of illness, disability, addiction, personal loss, parenting problem, abuse situation or other stressful life problem, there are local self-help clearinghouses in many parts of the country available to help you. They can advise you if there is any local self-help group near you to meet your need. Most clearinghouses can also help if you are interested in joining with others to start a new group (by providing suggestions, resource materials, possibly training workshops, or publicity in their newsletter if they have one).

Alabama - Birmingham area 205-251-5912 (provides group information only)
 Arizona - 800-352-3792 (in AZ only); 602-231-0868
 Arkansas - northeast area 501-932-5555 (group information only)
 California - San Diego 619-543-0412; San Francisco 415-921-4044;
 Sacramento 916-368-3100; Modesto 209-558-7454; Davis 916-756-8181.
 Connecticut - 203-624-6982
 Illinois* - 312-368-9070; Champaign 217-352-0099; Macon 217-429-HELP
 Iowa - 800-952-4777 (in Iowa); 515-576-5870
 Kansas - 800-445-0116 (in KS); 316-689-3843
 Massachusetts - 413-545-2313
 Michigan* - 800-777-5556 (in MI); 517-484-7373
 Missouri - Kansas City 816-822-7272; St. Louis 314-773-1399
 Nebraska - 402-476-9668
 New Jersey - 800-FOR-M.A.S.H. (in NJ); 201-625-9565
 NY - New York City 212-586-5770; Westchester** 914-949-0788, ext. 237
 NC - Mecklenberg area 704-331-9500
 North Dakota - 701-235-SEEK
 Ohio - Dayton area 513-225-3004; Toledo area 419-475-4449
 Oregon - Portland area 503-222-5555 (group information only)
 PA - Pittsburgh area 412-261-5363; Scranton area 717-961-1234
 SC - Midlands area 803-791-9227
 TN - Knoxville area 423-584-9125; Memphis area 901-323-8485
 Texas* - 512-454-3706
 Greater Washington, DC, and northern VA - 703-941-LINK

for international/national group contacts and/or a printed directory:
 American Self-Help Clearinghouse 201-625-7101, TTY 625-9053, and
 on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.cmhc.com/selfhelp/>
 National Self-Help Clearinghouse 212-354-8525

Self-Help Clearinghouses in Canada

Calgary* (403) 262-1117
 Nova Scotia (902) 466-2011
 Toronto* (416) 487-4355
 Prince Edward Island (902) 628-1648
 Vancouver (604) 876-6086
 Winnipeg (204) 589-5500 or 633-5955

- * maintains listings of additional local clearinghouses operating within their state/province.
 ** call Westchester for information on local clearinghouses in parts of upstate New York.

6/18/96

Carl H. Scott, Ph.D.

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Letting GO

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SPEAKING CIRCLES MAKE DEBUT AT LOS ANGELES CHAPTER

by John C. Harrison

For two hours every Tuesday night over the last four years I've been participating in a novel public speaking class. It's called a "speaking circle", and it may one day revolutionize the way all of us learn to become at ease in front of an audience.

I've seen an endless parade of people come through the class during my four years. Almost without exception, everyone started out afraid to be judged, unwilling to look bad, afraid of relating personally with the audience, uncomfortable with pauses, frightened of being themselves—in short, people were generally a nervous wreck when they first stood up to speak.

But after a relatively few weeks, a startling transformation took hold. People started developing confidence to be themselves. They learned to trust their mind to give them what they needed. They started making personal contact with the audience. They began to feel grounded.

Speaking circles have just been introduced to the Orange County and Pittsburgh chapters of the NSP. If they catch on, they can become a valuable addition to every chapter. I'd like to speculate on what promise speaking circles hold for all of us.

What is a speaking circle?

A speaking circle is not really a circle at all, but a unique environment that melds both a feeling of risk and a secure and supportive environment. The concept was developed by Lee Glickstein, a

public speaking coach in San Francisco; himself, a person who grew up petrified of being in front of others.

Four to ten people are typically involved in the meeting. People speak twice a night, the first time for three minutes, the second time for five. Your talk can be something prepared, though most people opt to speak off the cuff.

After each talk, the person is encouraged to share his or her experience of speaking. After the five minute talk the floor is also opened to positive (and only positive) feedback. And each talk is videotaped.

Videotaped?

You heard right. Every week, each person brings his own tape which is used to record his talk, and then he (or she) takes the tape back to watch at home.

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"Baring My Soul"

by Ralph Steinhauser

Here are some experiences I've had that I would like to share with the NSP. I hope they help someone who has had similar problems.

I'm 73 now, and I think when I was seven or eight I knew I was different because I stuttered. I became withdrawn and did things by myself and was depressed and even cried because I couldn't say my name without stuttering.

One day when I was very young, I remember going to the barber shop for a haircut. When my turn came, this woman pushed her son ahead of me. I started to protest and stammered and stuttered a lot, and the barber said to me "Can't you talk right, dummy?" I was so hurt and ashamed I ran crying out of the store vowing never to have that happen to me again.

So I became a master at avoiding, changing words and using tricks to get by. My parents saw how unhappy I was, and all they would say was "Don't worry

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Ralph and Rita Steinhauser



Richard Masias' first TV appearance at the Orange County workshop.

You get in touch with you.

There are several reasons why speaking circles have such a strong impact:

- *People are fully heard.* How often have you felt that people weren't listening to you? Perhaps you felt your stuttering got in the way or that you had nothing important to share. In a speaking circle, the audience focuses full attention and support on the speaker, no matter what they say. You can even remain completely silent for the full time and simply connect with the group. The purpose is to simply feel the audience support.

- *You have complete freedom.* There's no pressure put on you. You don't have to perform for anyone. You have up to five minutes to find out what you're really thinking and feeling. No matter what you do, that time is totally yours.

- *People receive only positive feedback.* When was the last time somebody told you about what you did well? For some of us, it hardly ever happens. Consequently, we automatically focus on what we think wasn't right. Hearing nothing but positive feedback helps to balance the score and keeps us open and feeling good about ourselves.

- *You get to see yourself on videotape.* The first reaction people often have is "Yuuuck, I don't want to see how terrible I am!" Yet, when most people see their tape for the second time (or even third time as you are encouraged to do in the beginning), they start making positive discoveries about what they like. Most revealing is that even though you might have been totally petrified and self-conscious and stuttering while giving the talk, if you were connecting with the audience and being genuine, you ended up looking pretty good. If there are things you'd like to improve, viewing the tape will give you direction.

Speaking circles are extraordinarily powerful, because they address not only who you are as a speaker, but who you are as a person. They help transform your emotions, perceptions, and beliefs.

They build self-esteem. They can even become a great place to work through current life issues.

Making it happen.

On March 23rd and 24th we conducted a full day-and-a-half speaking circle for 10 people in Orange County, CA to launch the program. Here's what some of the participants had to say:

Robin Deschamps: "Seeing the tape showed that I'm starting to accept my stutter, which I am now. I also think I'll take more risks in the future, after attending this workshop. This was the most fun I've had in quite some time."

Richard Macias: "I learned that I've got to stop being so serious. I learned that I need to be able to laugh at myself, and that it's okay."

Bob Spradley: "I saw a person I haven't seen before. I saw room for improvement, but I saw how far this person has come."

Shannon Skupien: "When I first got up to speak, I felt a lot of anxiety. But in viewing the tape, I didn't come across that way. I looked okay."

Donna Leonard: "Hearing all that positive feedback really pointed out to me how we don't validate people. Look at how great we made each other feel! I think what I got from watching my tape was more confidence in myself. I've never thought that I've had that confidence, but after seeing the tape, I see that I actually do."

Angus Croll: "On the way home I was thinking—if you got ten fluent people off the street and brought them here, I doubt whether their speaking would be as good as ours."

The workshop was so rewarding that the Orange County chapter is now running a speaking circle twice a month, on alternate weeks to the regular chapter meeting.

What's so compelling about speaking circles is that you don't need to have a trained facilitator. It's the format itself that does the magic. If you want to start a speaking circle in your chapter, the national office can send you printed material and a video, so you can see a real speaking circle in action. Then all you need are some willing people and someone with a camcorder.

Total acceptance...total freedom...total support...a chance to take a risk...an opportunity to discover the real you...in a space that's totally yours. Where else in the world can you create that kind of experience?

Speaking coach Lee Glickstein is writing a book on speaking circles that's due out some time this year. This is hot stuff. And it could help to transform your life.

John C. Harrison is Program Director and a board member of the NSP.



Members who attended the second speaking circle held at the NSP offices in Anaheim included Angus Croll, Richard Masias, Richard Brower, Annie Bradberry, Doris Denby, Gillian Lee and Shannon Skupien.

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful
beyond measure
It is our light not our darkness that most
frightens us
We ask ourselves who am I to be brilliant
gorgeous talented and fabulous?
Actually who are you not to be?
You are a child of God Your playing
small doesn't serve the world
There's nothing enlightening about
shrinking so that other people won't
feel insecure around you
We are born to make manifest the glory
of God that is with us
It is not just in some of us it's in everyone
And as we let our own light shine we
unconsciously give other people
permission to do the same
And as we are liberated from our own
fear our presence automatically
liberates others*

Marianne Williamson
from the book *Return to Love*

Philadelphia Area Chapter of the NSP Sample Meeting Format

(NOTE: When possible, the primary facilitator should assign different people to lead various parts of the meeting. Certain portions — such as the Opening Words, Stutterer's Declaration, and Closing Words — can be pasted on index cards for convenience. This format is intended only as a guide and may be modified. There probably will not be enough time to do everything in this format in a single meeting; therefore, certain parts can be omitted as the group desires. For variety, other elements can be added or substituted.)

Sign in. Free time.

Welcoming Words

"Welcome to the Philadelphia Area Chapter of the National Stuttering Project.

"If you are a person who stutters, or have a special interest in stuttering, you are welcome here. For the two hours we meet here, this room is a very special place. It is a place where we are accepted and supported, where we can relax, speak freely, stutter openly without fear or embarrassment, and practice whatever fluency technique we may feel comfortable with.

"Together, we will help each other help ourselves to accept and deal with our stuttering, to build our self-confidence, and to improve our fluency to the best of our abilities."

(If there is a Guest Speaker: "Later in the meeting we will be having a special presentation by our guest speaker, _____.")

Relaxation Exercises

"First, let us begin our meeting by shedding the tensions of the day by loosening up, relaxing our bodies, and warming up our vocal cords."

As background, we may play soft, relaxing music or use metronome set at slow speed. Leader can modify or elaborate on the following. Basic elements are:

Sit straight with feet on floor. Loosening up exercises: arms, shoulders, neck, mouth. Close eyes.

Relax body: Start with rectum, tighten and then relax it. Then feel relaxation spread upwards to the abdomen, chest, neck, larynx, jaw, mouth, lips, and tongue. Guided visualization is optional.

Abdominal breathing. Feel abdomen go in and out as you breathe. Don't hold the breath. Relax your abdomen as you exhale. Don't force.

Vocalization. On the relaxed outward breath, while relaxing your abdomen, gently bring vocal cords together and make an "aah" sound. (Repeat several times.) Then vocalize other vowel sounds: ay, ee, i, o, oo.

Then say: "I am relaxed. I feel good. Speech is easy. Speech is fun." (Or some other phrase.) Eyes are then opened.

Declaration

While the group holds hands in a circle, a designated person leads the group in the following declaration, with the group repeating each phrase in unison:

"My name is (state your name).
I am a person who stutters.
I can live with that, and so can you.
I'm not afraid to stutter
and I'm not afraid to change,
as every day I learn more and more control.
I listen to the music of my voice.
I do not force,
I do not fear,
For together we are strong."

The Alphabet Game

Explanation: In this exercise, the first person inserts a word or name beginning with the letter *A*. (E.g., "I went to the beach and I brought an *apple*.") The second person then leads the group in repeating in unison what was just said, and then he or she adds a word or name beginning with the letter *B*. (E.g., "I went to the beach and I brought an apple and a *ball*.") The third person then leads the group in repeating everything that has gone before and adds a word or name beginning with the letter *C*, and so on. Continue with this around the group at least once, and perhaps more times depending on the size of the group. The exercise involves both unison and individual speaking, as well as other benefits.

"I went (to the beach and I brought) _____." Other possible topics:
(to the zoo and I saw)
(to the store and I bought)
(to the movies and I saw)
(to a party and I met)
(on vacation and I visited)
(to a restaurant and I had)

Optional: Other speaking exercises or games may be substituted for variety.

Introductions

Go around circle. Each person introduces self and briefly shares some concern or event.

Optional: Members pair up and introduce each other privately, learning each others' names, where they live, what they do, etc. Then each pair introduces each other to the group.

Program

Introduce Guest Speaker, if there is one, and turn meeting over to him or her for speaker's presentation. Presentations are to be followed by a group discussion.

When there is no guest speaker, the program will usually be devoted to some form of discussion or activity, relevant to stuttering, in which the entire group will participate. The following are just a few suggestions:

- Group readings imparting basic suggestions for dealing with stuttering and improving fluency. Either one person at a time, or pairs speaking in unison, take turns reading paragraphs or items from: "The Fluency Cycle," "Steps in Speaking," or other excerpts from *Understanding and Controlling Stuttering*; lists of suggestions from *Self-Help for the Stutterer*; or excerpts from other literature. This is followed by a group discussion of what was read.
- An open format, in which members raise specific issues or problems concerning stuttering, which are then discussed by the group.
- Group activities such as speaking exercises, role playing, acting, poetry reading, experiments with fluency techniques, etc.

Feedback Questionnaire

"This is your group, and we want to do whatever we can to plan and structure meetings to best serve your needs. Therefore, your comments and suggestions are most important. If there is anything you like or dislike about the meetings, or would like us to do in the future, please let us know. To help improve our meetings, we have a sheet we'd like you to fill out to give us your feedback. (Pass out the sheet.) You can either hand it in at the end of the meeting, or mail it to us later."

Intermission (Short comfort break.)

Business and Announcements

Items of Chapter business (if any) to be discussed and decided by the group.

Announcements of upcoming meetings, workshops, conventions, and other events or news of interest to the stuttering community.

Registration of New Members:

"If you are not already on our local mailing list, please make sure that we have your complete name, address, and phone number, so we can send you our local newsletter

and keep you advised of meetings and events."

(Give each new person a registration form to be filled out. This should be added to local mailing list, with a copy sent to national headquarters for follow-up.)

Encouragement to Join the NSP national organization:

"Our local Chapter is affiliated with the National Stuttering Project, a nationwide, non-profit organization which publishes an excellent bi-monthly newsletter, as well as books and pamphlets about stuttering. It holds a national convention every year and sponsors regional workshops and symposiums. It has also been influential in combating negative stereotypes about stuttering in movies and on TV.

"We encourage you to join the NSP and to give it your support. Please write or call the National Stuttering Project, 5100 E. LaPalma Avenue, Suite 208, Anaheim Hills, CA 92807; telephone 1-800-264-1677. The dues are only \$35 per year, or \$20 for full-time students."

(Make arrangements to have some kind of form filled out and sent to national headquarters, or get materials from the NSP to hand out.)

Assignments for Next Meeting:

Persons may be asked to volunteer to facilitate various portions of future meetings or to give special presentations, etc. A list is made of who is to do what.

"This entails your commitment to be present at the meeting. If you find you will not be able to attend, you must call and tell the facilitator in advance."

Telephone Network:

Persons may be assigned to telephone various other persons on our membership list and to report back at the next meeting.

Extemporaneous Speaking

"This is the time in our meeting when we all have a chance to come to the lectern and give a short extemporaneous talk to the group. During each talk, remember the importance of *eye contact*. This goes both ways. The speaker should keep eye contact with the listeners and the listeners should keep eye contact with the person speaking."

Time limit. Based on number of participants, divide the available time so that each person will have an equal time to speak.

Options for selecting the topic:

Free-style.

Previously assigned topics or types of readings (e.g., poetry, jokes, reports, etc.)

Multiple categories to be suggested by group and listed on the board.

Drawing — topics written by group on slips of paper and drawn at random.

Closing

Group stands in circle, holding hands.

Closing words (to be read by an assigned person):

"May the spirit we have shared tonight help our speech in the coming weeks, until we meet again. May we go forth gladly into speaking situations, without force or struggle, accepting ourselves regardless of fluency, and listening always to the music of our voices. We are not alone. Together we are strong."

Then all squeeze hands and repeat: "Together we are strong."

(Optional: Members may take turns giving closing words of their choosing.)

End of meeting.

(Rev. 9/10/96)

Bill Parry

