

E L F - H E L P

W O R K B O O K

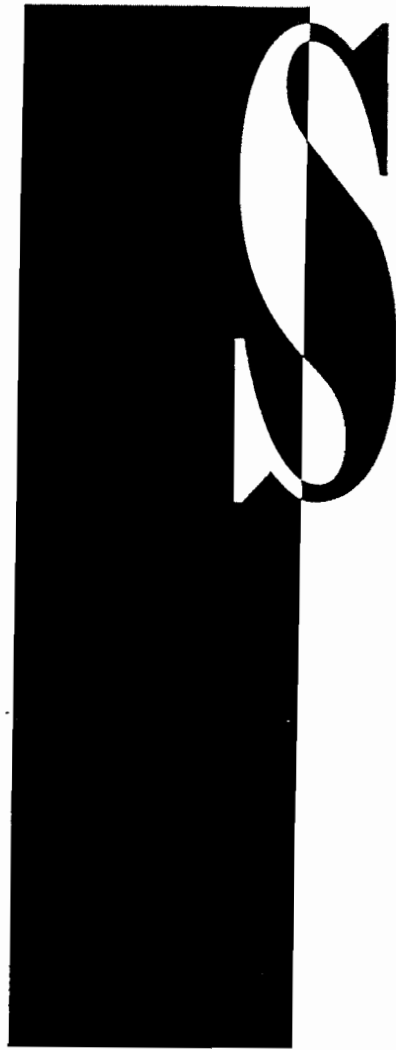
F O R P E O P L E

W H O S T U T T E R

BY MICHAEL SUGARMAN, M.S.W., M.B.A.

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PREFACE

As I read through Michael's workbook, my mind went back 12 years to the early days of the National Stuttering Project. We had a small office then on a side alley of a back street in the small city of Walnut Creek, California.

It was not an auspicious beginning, but for me that little office held all the joy and promise of heaven. It represented the sunlight of comradeship streaming down into a part of me that had laid hidden for most of my life, a cold, lonely part of me that basked in this new warmth. The office and the people involved in the young NSP became quickly familiar to me because I had looked for and visualized them before somewhere inside me.

But with this sunlight and familiarity, this heaven, came a bit of hell too. My experience in that office and among these people also brought darkness before my eyes at times, as the unknown was thrust before me constantly, and the fears and avoidance I had carried throughout 24 years of my life were challenged. It was scary; the unknown always is. There were uncomfortable experiences to be gone through to earn the right to bask in the sunlight.

Michael was a guide to me then. He guided me through the dark patches with his insights and questions (like the ones here in this workbook), questions I had not thought to ever ask myself.

But more importantly, Michael inspired me by his example. I tell people that Michael slept on a couch in that small office for months and lived on peanuts, I say that quite literally. (I saw the peanut shells.) He kept the NSP alive with his determination to foster dignity for we who stutter. If not for Michael, there is every reason to believe the NSP and my job as its director, would not be here today.

He did inspire me, and surrounded by such an atmosphere of solidarity and courage, the darkness inside me was completely erased over time. The unknown became a place to explore, not run from.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Until I was twenty-three years old, I had a problem that was controlling me and my life. This problem was stuttering. It is estimated that approximately 1% of the world's population stutters, and I would speculate that for many of us every day is filled with fear, anxiety and self-denial.

Stuttering caused me great anxiety. I was constantly worried about what a listener must be thinking of me as I struggled to push the words out. And when the words just wouldn't come, the problem escalated as I became more frustrated and more afraid of speaking. A wave of helplessness, shame and guilt would overcome me. When the words finally came, they were most often not the words I meant to say, only those in which I was fluent. These feelings of inadequacy grew and grew, and over the years stuttering slowly became an integral part of who I was.

As time went on, I learned various ways to try to disguise my stuttering, substituting easy words for difficult ones, giving only short answers to questions or not speaking unless it was absolutely necessary. I would talk fast or in a low voice. I avoided people, social situations that I perceived to be threatening, even my own feelings---the list is endless.

I never told anyone that I stuttered. I didn't want to admit to anyone that I was different because of it. Yet, this is precisely what I needed to do in order to come to grips with my stuttering. Admitting to having a stuttering problem was the essential first step toward becoming my true self.

In 1975, I entered speech therapy, for the third time in my life. This time, I felt I was ready to disclose my emotional experiences to others. I found within myself the courage to take the risks in confronting my stuttering and change my behavior. I located a speech therapist with whom I felt comfortable and who was willing to listen to my experiences, help me confront my stuttering and cooperate with me during the ensuing two years of therapy.

Although I went into therapy hoping to achieve fluency, I came away with something even more valuable. First, I began to understand my emotional attachment to my stuttering which had become such an integral part of who I was. And second, I gained confidence in my ability to communicate my own thoughts, in my own words, and get on with the business of attaining my life goals regarding friends, family and career. Stuttering was no longer a barrier to the pursuit of my daily life. I realized that it was OK for me to stutter.

In 1976, I met Bob Goldman, another person who stutters. We sat and talked for hours sharing personal stories. From these conversations, the National Stuttering Project (NSP) was born. The NSP is a non-profit organization for people who stutter. The intent of its programs is to encourage and develop personal independence and self-confidence through the utilization of comfortable and tension-free group situations. Many people who stutter have joined together in such groups to share common concerns such as those of self-image, employment discrimination, attitudinal barriers, family problems and other issues that people who stutter must deal with everyday. The support groups provide an opportunity to present personal feelings, resolve personal and social conflicts and have empowered many of us to do things we might have previously thought impossible.

My strong conviction about “letting go” of our emotional attachment to our stuttering is woven throughout this workbook. Beyond attempting to meet the need for information that people who stutter share, I wish to instill in you, the reader, a commitment to achieve personal fulfillment.

Warmly,

Michael Sugarman

INTRODUCTION

What will you be learning in this workbook? In the beginning chapters you will explore the attitudes and misperceptions that can hold us back from living to our fullest potential. The chapters "Coming Out" and "Confrontation" emphasize the importance of recognizing and accepting our stuttering behavior. "Letting Go" teaches us how to disassociate ourselves from destructive self-concepts. And the final chapter, "New Perspective", describes the process by which we can separate ourselves from the stutterer image and see ourselves as people.

Being a person who stutters is often perceived as a limitation and restriction. It takes courage to confront a stuttering behavior and develop a self-image that allows for true self-expression and achievement of life goals. It is my sincere hope that you become aware of your right to pursue life goals without limitations or restrictions.

By reading about and actively working on issues which affect you, you can learn more about yourself and how to identify and solve problem aspects of your stuttering behavior. Whether you are in speech therapy or a group, problem-solving and change are key elements to reducing the influence stuttering has on your life.

The Self-Help Workbook for People Who Stutter is not intended to be a "cookbook". I cannot presume to be capable of giving you simple step-by-step instructions or a list of the "ingredients" you will need to make fluent communication a reality. But what I can do is give you information and ideas, based on my own experiences and association with the NSP, that can enable you to make changes in your own life. The process takes time, hard work and determination. But I am sure you will find it well worth the effort.

HOW TO USE THE WORKBOOK

The Self-Help Workbook for People Who Stutter is designed as a tool to aid you in moving away from self-defeating negative concepts about yourself and your stuttering behavior and toward more positive, realistic attitudes about yourself and life goals. This workbook may be used in any of the following ways:

1. *As a self-help manual:* You should be able to get a good understanding of the information offered through reading the material and working on the exercises by yourself. Even better, find a friend or relative that you might feel close to and who is willing to listen and further discuss your responses to the exercises. The main focus of these exercises is to heighten your own awareness of your feelings about your stuttering behavior---the first step toward change.

2. *As a group project:* While this workbook lends itself well to individual use, I highly recommend that you work with a group of other people who stutter, either by joining an existing group or forming one. You will quickly realize that there is a strength in working together with others who are similarly committed.

3. *As a tool in speech therapy:* The exercises may also be used as an adjunct to speech therapy with the added benefit of the practical experience of the therapist who, of course, is also an important source of information and techniques.

R **ECOGNITION**

Unfortunately, there are those people who do not separate a problem behavior, such as stuttering, from the person. We who stutter are often stereotyped by our stuttering rather than our true abilities. There is also a tendency for others to misinterpret our actual needs and desires which, in essence, demonstrates a lack of trust in our ability to make life decisions. Our attempts to communicate what we really want often seem futile because others may make silent assumptions based on their perception of what we want and need.

Consequently, our identities have been influenced by a barrage of misinterpretations by and interactions with parents, caretakers, spouses, and a myriad of others who label and describe us according to their own perceptions, regardless of what we actually think and feel. When we interact in social situations, painful and frustrating memories of these past interactions limit our abilities to fully assert ourselves and demand to be heard. We became a "stutterer" in our own eyes as well as the eyes of others.

These repeated misinterpretations and labels can become overwhelming to us, causing us to act and appear helpless. We come to believe that we are unable to communicate our wants and needs resulting in an inability to make life choices and live independently. We come to believe our stuttering restricts us in attaining our goals when, in fact, we are restricting ourselves.

D *ISAVOWAL*

Initially, people who stutter fight against the labels which our parents, teachers, caretakers and speech pathologists put on us. At first we may struggle internally with other's perceptions of us as being different. But slowly we give in to the onslaught of labels and finally see ourselves as others view us---as stutterers.

You can begin your process of recognition by recalling episodes that contributed to your identity as a "stutterer". The following exercises will help you reach back to the times in your life when you struggled against the label.

EXERCISES:

1. Write down and discuss situations in which you felt: different; secure; dependent; independent.

2. Write about three situations where you struggled to express who you are. Discuss your innermost thoughts about these times.

3. Write down and discuss three responses that people have made about your stuttering and how you responded to them.

4. Make a list of adjectives that you feel others use to describe you or your stuttering. Then indicate whether you agree or disagree with these descriptions and discuss why.

Handwriting practice area consisting of 30 horizontal dotted lines for writing.

L **ONELINESS**

Often times there is another person living inside of a person who stutters. One that wants to express his/her thoughts and needs in his/her own words but can't. When others are constantly finishing your thoughts and words for you as they perceive them to be (usually inaccurately) the real person inside rarely surfaces. S/he stays inside where nobody can hear. It is a difficult way to pursue life, isolated and alone.

We who stutter know the frustration of not feeling capable of pursuing our life goals. We have learned to communicate according to the dictates of other's interpretations of our stuttering. We may feel depressed or limited in our life choices.

The following exercises will help you explore how being identified as a "stutterer" can be an isolating experience.

EXERCISES:

1. List five statements people have made to you concerning your limitations because of your stuttering and how you felt. Discuss which made you feel the worst.

2. List a negative statement you have said to yourself in each of the following situations. Then next the statement, describe how you felt.

a. Employment interview:

b. Ordering in a restaurant:

c. Social gatherings:

d. Classes:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of a solid top line, a dashed middle line, and a solid bottom line, repeated down the page.

3. This is a "time line". Beginning with birth, recall and describe some of your memories relating to your stuttering behavior, describing each situation noting on the time line when it occurred.

4. Write a paragraph about how you feel when people focus on your stuttering and discuss.

Birth

Present

Lined writing area for responses to questions 3 and 4.

I **INTERNALIZATION**

Internalization is the gradual process whereby our stuttering behavior becomes an integral part of our own identity: "I am a stutterer". Stuttering then defines who we are, how we act and what we can do in life. We soon see ourselves as a "stutterer" rather than as a person who happens to stutter.

Life becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy we live the way a person who stutters is "supposed" to live, rather than being who we want to be. Further, we reduce self expectations and lessen our aspirations conform to the limited opportunities which we imagine or are told are available. When contemplating employment we may not be able to imagine ourselves in a fulfilling career, or upon dreaming of marriage we may wonder who would marry someone who stutters. In school we may be afraid of achievement because we are not expected to achieve like others. The problem begins by giving up control of our lives to stuttering and saying "If only I didn't stutter, I would be/have done _____."

The following exercises will help you examine the effect of your "stutterer" identity on life choices and goals.

EXERCISES:

1. Write a short story entitled "Life With a Stutterer".

2. List five experiences that have made you feel like "a stutterer".

3. List five individuals who, at some time, made you feel you were a stutterer. Beside each person's name write down what they said or did that made you feel this way.

4. Write down and discuss your expectations of personal relationships, marriage, education and employment opportunities.

A large area of the page is filled with horizontal dotted lines, providing space for the student to complete the four exercises listed on the left.

5. Write down and discuss your feelings about the following topics: What is my attitude toward and perception of myself? Of people in therapy? Of people making money? Of people having fun? Of people who are successful?

Lined writing area with horizontal dotted lines.

COMING OUT

We, as people who stutter silently struggle against our self presumption of inferior status. However, if any change in status is to occur, that change must be self initiated.

"Coming Out" and owning our stuttering is the essential first step toward change. There are two distinct levels involved in the process of coming out. One is the acknowledgement stage where we begin to learn about stuttering. This exploration consists of learning about both the physiological and emotional effects of stuttering. Some people research stuttering in the library, others may enter speech therapy or psychological counselling, still others may join self-help groups or take self-improvement courses.

The second level is admission, whereby we openly confess to owning stuttering as something we do. Rather than blaming others or denying that we stutter, we can say, "I know I stutter and want to deal with it." We have often gone to speech therapists to cure us and make us fluent. However, before any therapy can meet our goal, we have to "own" our stuttering and commit to creating a new self image.

The following exercises will assist us to admit to ourselves and to others the effects our stuttering has had on our lives.

EXERCISES:

1. Write about something you have never before disclosed about your stuttering and discuss it.

2. Write a short script entitled: "A Conversation with My Stuttering".

3. In your own words, define and give examples of the following: passive; powerless; empower; and assertive.

A large area of the page is filled with horizontal dotted lines, providing a space for writing answers to the exercises.

4. Write a paper or do another kind of project based on your stuttering. Use available resources in your community such as the library, another person that stutters, a speech therapist, etc.

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5. 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	Consequences

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L **ETTING GO**

“Letting go” is the process whereby you learn to give up negative self-images which prevent you from realizing your potential. You need to:

a) Recognize when your stuttering restricts participation in social situations:

b) Acknowledge when your inner dialogue inhibits your communications with others:

c) Admit to anticipating others’ reactions to your stuttering.

d) Let go of negative identities which dictate and limit how you interact with your environment.

The purpose of the following exercises is to help you experience the above steps.

EXERCISES:

1. Keep a journal for one week, being aware of and writing down what triggers negative self statements. Even after the week is over continue to notice the things that you do to put yourself down. You may even choose to continue keeping this journal as a method of continually heightening your awareness of your reactions and learning to change them.

2. Jot down and discuss your thoughts on this topic: It's important for people who stutter to learn to ask for what they want instead of being manipulating or controlling. Asking directly for what you want increases your chances of receiving it. It is often frightening to attempt this because it might seem risky to be honest and let others know how you really feel. And there's always the chance that the other person may say no.

3. Write down three conversations you've had in the past week. Next to each one, write down what you think the other person was thinking and why.

Dotted lines for writing notes.

4. Write a paragraph expressing as specifically as possible why your stuttering bothers you. Then write another paragraph discussing what strengths you may have developed as a result of stuttering.

5. People who stutter may often feel powerless and adopt a passive attitude. Along with feelings of powerlessness, there is often anger and resistance. It is easy to blame other people for what they do or don't do for you. List ten activities you have wanted to do. Pick three and do them.

Dotted lines for writing.

A **NEW PERSPECTIVE**

This workbook enables you to examine how others view you, how you have internalized those perceptions and how you have identified yourself as a stutterer. We have explored how this process creates negative self-images that can limit us and narrow our expectations of ourselves and life goals.

In this section you will learn things that can help to liberate you from negative self-images, enable you to express who you really are and pursue self-fulfilling life goals and aspirations. In order to succeed at this, you must consider a new perspective toward you stuttering. You must:

- a) Understand the previous stages.
- b) Admit your stuttering does exist and confront it.
- c) Reject the “stutterer” stigma that can limit your expectations.
- d) View yourself as a person first, rather than allowing your stuttering to become your primary identity.
- e) Acknowledge that society, to a large extent, will still interact with you as a stutterer, and that it is your responsibility to be aware of and deal with these feelings.
- f) Know that once you are in touch with your feelings, you can choose your own responses.

Developing a new perspective on yourself is not an easy process nor does it magically happen all at once. Rather, it is a continual process of gaining awareness, dealing with and thinking about ourselves and the society we live in. The following exercises will help facilitate this change.

EXERCISES:

1. Write down and discuss your thoughts on personal values, stereotypes and self-respect.

2. What "ten commandments" would best summarize your own rules, ideals, and taboos regarding stuttering.

3. Write down and discuss three personal goals you wish to accomplish in your lifetime.

A large area of the page is filled with horizontal dotted lines, providing space for writing answers to the exercises.

4. Choose two of the following challenges (or some of your own) to tackle during the next two weeks. Start with the easiest. Record your experiences.

Introduce yourself to a new person.

Invite someone over or out to dinner.

Ask three people for directions.

Go somewhere you've always wanted to go.

A vertical line separates the text from a large area of horizontal dotted lines for writing.

5. Make a list of situations in which you have felt powerless. One of the ways people who stutter remain passive is to believe there are no alternatives to the way they think or behave. Remember: There are always alternatives. Next to your list of situations, make a list of alternatives.

6. Write a short piece entitled, "I Am a Person".

Lined writing area with horizontal dotted lines for text entry.

AUTHOR'S FINAL NOTE

We have all learned, through experiences both painful and victorious, that we must look toward ourselves and one another to find answers. These answers seek to eliminate the barriers which get in our way and interfere with our ability to communicate. People who stutter have common feelings and experiences and therefore a common bond. We are the best resource for pulling ourselves out of inactivity and helplessness and into a position of personal fulfillment.

I would therefore encourage you to join the National Stuttering Project and work with other people who stutter in your community toward both personal and social change.



SELF-HELP WORKBOOK FOR PEOPLE WHO  STUTTER

This twenty-four page workbook offers:

Exercises which heighten your awareness about your stuttering behavior.

Tools to move you away from self-defeating negative concepts about yourself and towards more positive realistic attitudes and life goals.

Can be used by individuals, self-help groups or as an adjunct to speech therapy to explore communication skills.

Written by Michael Sugarman, MSW and co-founder of the National Stuttering Project.



Please send me _____ copy(ies) of the **Self-Help Workbook for People Who Stutter** to:

Name: _____

Address: _____



Price: \$5.00 per book

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