Communication Workshop

for People Who Stammer (PWS)
29th March - 3rd April 2010

The Indian Stammering Association

MedicaSynergie, a health care organization

"..I am learning to speak up about what I feel. It is very hard to actually 'say' what is going on in my mind at times because till the age of 21, I did not do that. So, it's as if I am learning to talk again.."

Mugdha Benjamin

Acknowledgement

We thank Medica Synergie for arranging the logistics and providing a very encouraging atmosphere; We also wish to thank Ms Sweta and Dr Durba for their participation and help. Last, we wish to thank each and every participant for the courage it takes to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences about stammering.

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Objective

TISA presents self help as a valuable option for people who stammer and don't have access to speech therapy or can't afford one or who have tried much and lost interest in mainstream speech therapy. The course was based on [CALMS approach](#) to stammering management, eastern Meditative and breathing techniques and concepts of Self-motivation. We specially focused on sharing and practicing four techniques: Bouncing, prolongation, pausing and voluntary stuttering. Self-acceptance was the underlying philosophical framework for the workshop.

Participants

A total of nine members participated in the workshop, including the facilitator. Some participants were able to attend part of the six day workshop due to other commitments. Here is a brief introduction.

Vivek, 23 yrs, is a BBA student from Kolkata. Nilukshi Cooray, 21 yrs, is a student from Asian University for women, in Chittagong, Bangladesh. Sanjeet, 32 yrs, is a Senior Module Lead/ Technical lead in an IT firm in Pune. Manohar, 27 yrs, is an IT professional from Pune. Sweta, 33 yrs, is an Administrative officer from Kolkata. Sachin, 52 yrs is a social worker from Dehradun. Rahul Das, 26 yrs, is a student at stock exchange at Kolkata. Saurav Basu, 21 yrs, a graduate student from south 24 pargana district. Rahul and Saurav attended the workshop for 1-2 days only.

Dr Durba, 26 yrs, attended the workshop as a SLP (speech therapist).

Methodology

Few days before the workshop, participants were asked to review 4-5 stammering related blogs on Internet and submit a "write up" on their stammering- as a warm up exercise. The workshop was participatory, exploratory and "hands on". We used AV aids (slides, video clips, movies), case studies, practice sessions for motor techniques, formal presentations by participants, Internet based home assignments, energizers and morning meditations, where we discussed deeper cognitive issues.

Video recording of some presentations was done with explicit permission from participants, to be later analyzed and discussed. The language used was mostly English. Towards the end, the group went to a shopping mall, to practice speech targets in a real life situation. Participants were individually helped to develop personal goals, to guide their efforts after the workshop.

Frequent recapitulation was used to help participants internalize new concepts. Block correction techniques were frequently practiced. Energizers, which often

involved spontaneous speech, were used creatively. Participants posted a summary on the blog at the end of the day. Morning meditation was a time to share and practice what we knew about relaxation and breathing techniques. Facilitator attempted to give participants individualized feedback & counseling based on their needs.

We frequently reviewed and monitored our daily activities by taking regular feedback from all the participants. Daily summaries provided indirect feedback. We will be doing a long term evaluation over next 12 months.

(Above: An Interesting discussion- to be able to talk about stammering is the first major step for many)

Workshop content

The work shop's main focus was on communication skills rather than on fluency or 'cure'. The participants were given a chance to explore their stuttering and, feelings and emotions attached to it ('*play with it*'), and gradually move from the feeling of helplessness to a sense of being in **control**. Here is a brief description of the theme and content of the workshop.

First 1-2 days were spent in discussing what stammering is- in general and also in our own particular cases since we all stammer in a different way; we did this by sharing and discussing videos and case studies, using mutual videography, and through "**Stuttering Iceberg**" exercise.(ref 1, ref 2)

(Credit: http://www.breakingpointsystems.com/community/images/rock-climbing.jpg)

From day 1 onwards we introduced various techniques. Bouncing, Prolongation, pausing and voluntary stuttering were introduced, discussed and practiced in group and gradually with strangers, under increasingly difficult circumstances (more info). '**Acceptance**' was discussed as the underlying philosophical framework. One can and should practice climbing the pinnacles of various techniques, metaphorically speaking- but whenever we fall, and occasionally we ALL were going to fall- we fall in the ocean of Acceptance below without getting hurt (see picture above).

In this context we talked about – **cognitive distortions** (ref), emotional issues and need for a philosophy of life, which allows us to be at peace with ourselves. The way we *look* at speaking situations, the audience, ourselves in the act of talking- and the *meanings* we give to it- decides how we will *feel* about it and finally *perform* the task of communication. If we accept ourselves as we are at this moment, without struggle and shame, there is a chance that 'motor' techniques might work, that we might persist with the techniques and with the broader program for self-change.

In this context, we also introduced various kind of breathing (belly breathing especially), its role in conscious relaxation, positive visualization and meditation. **Valsalva** mechanism and the role of body language (eg. eye contact) also was shared. By third day, participants were practicing bouncing with strangers, asking questions, getting instructions and sharing the fact that they stammered- *while maintaining eye contact*. On fifth day we discussed modern approaches:

Pagoclone and Delayed Auditory Feedback machines (DAF & FAF), their use and limitations.

In the context of "**maintenance**" of the gains after workshop, we discussed various theories of self-change, understanding of "Locus of control", and role of self help group. From first day onwards, participants were making formal presentations in the group, with invited guests sometime. Some of these presentations were video-graphed for subsequent review by participants.

Attitude and **values**: Participants discussed in depth the role of self-defeating, recurring thought patterns and rationalizations. Unless these were recognized and changed, change in speech will not be long lasting. Overall communication, role of listening, of genuine interest in others – as opposed to mere fluent monologue, came up as an important area of concern and change.

We had a guided discussion about a personalized **plan of self change**- not just about the way we communicate but the way we look at life and our place in it. We agreed that giving and receiving help could help US and therefore promoting self help initiatives in whatever capacity, was going to be very important for us in the coming years.

We concluded with "best stutter awards" and mimicry. Dr Durba was asked to mimic all of us on the last day. A speech therapist must observe carefully all the mannerism and secondary behaviors of the client. She or he should be able to put client's stuttering in 'their own mouth'. This helps them to become better counselor and therapist. And we, the participants had to learn to look dispassionately at our mannerisms being mimicked, in an objective way, so that we could learn to dissociate stammering from the usual emotional reactions. Both the parties performed well!

Day wise summary

Daily summaries were written by Manohar and Nilukshi and put on the TISA blog. To keep this document small, we are offering links to the day's reports on TISA blog:

Day 1, Day 2, Day 3, Day 4, Day 5, Day 6,

Follow up of the workshop

- We plan to continuously be in touch with all the participants through various modes like e-mail, phone and blogs. All the participants have been given author rights to TISA blog (http://t-tisa.blogspot.com).

- Those participants who already have access to a SHG, will be encouraged to return and conduct sessions in their SHGs in collaboration with the

Coordinators. Others are being facilitated so that they can start a SHG initiative in their town.

- TISA will invite one of the participants to be the Assistant Trainer in the next Communication workshop, whenever it is organized.

Conclusion

Self help is a more empowering, affordable and enduring solution to a complex and chronic problem like stammering. For this, Self Help Group (SHG) is an important strategy. Even for mainstream speech therapists, SHG could be a good option, a good place where their clients can come and practice their speech skills in a safe environment- at no additional cost. The bottom line is- *On my own if I achieve howsoever little, it will be mine and will never be lost*.

(Above: A community is important to any self help initiative)

Appendix

About The Indian Stammering Association (TISA)

TISA is a self help, not-for-profit charitable trust; it's an association of Indian people who stammer (IPWS). It is active since 2007 and is registered in the office of Sub-registrar, Vikasnagar, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India on 13th Nov 2009, under Registration Act 1908. Its registration number is 6055. Its purpose is to collect and disseminate relevant, correct and unbiased information for people who stammer and their families, friends and society in general. It is promoting a self help group movement, where PWS learn to help each other and themselves in the ancient Indian spirit: "This Self is to be achieved through self effort!"

Studies have shown that self help groups (SHGs) provide most consistent and long-lasting support structure; more than any speech therapy or other technique/device. TISA co-ordinates city-wise SHGs in India; currently there are SHGs being run in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Pune, Surat and Dehradun.

Acceptance

Acceptance in the case of a PWS, has often been mis-understood. It is the first step towards change. It does not mean accepting the problem and staying put. It also does not mean denying the problem we face, running away from it or trivializing it. We reproduce here -with some minor changes, a very balanced understanding of what acceptance would mean in our case, from Tom Weidig:

> 1. I have a neuro-biological abnormality affecting my speech systems leading to a propensity to stutter.
> 2. I have to live with my abnormality for the rest of my life. (as far as we know today).
> 3. I have to work on myself if I want to improve my communication.
> 4. I have to work on myself if I want to minimize the psychological and social consequences of stuttering.
> 4. Shame, negative beliefs and most fears I held or experienced were completely unnecessary and harmful.
> 5. Stuttering had some positive effect in that I was forced to take a deeper look at myself and work harder.
> 6. Moderate to severe stuttering can be a burden to others who listen to me that I should try to minimize.
> 7. Some jobs that strongly focus on fluent verbal expression are not for people with moderate or severe stuttering.
> 8. I accept myself and others who stammer and will try to serve them, to best of my capacity.

Time Table

General structure

Morning jog at 6 am. Group meditation by 6.30 am. Meditation ends at 8 am. Relaxation & Belly breathing especially taught and practiced.

Evening practice session: 6-9 pm.

Content

Day 1 (29ᵗʰ March):

Forenoon:

Inaugural session:

screening "Ssstutter"- a 9 minute video, followed by

Write your 'bio' focusing on speech related milestones and therapy etc.

Write your expectations from these six days.

Facilitator moderates 'expectations' with what the workshop is offering in a brief presentation. Participants will be encouraged to write down two realistic goals for themselves at the end of the session.

Facilitator discusses the ground rules (eg. active participation in every activity is a must)..

Facilitator introduces 'Bouncing' and 'Prolongation' techniques

Afternoon: Screen "Unspeakable" movie, discussion & group presentations about it.

"Internet" and other assignments.

Day 2 (30ᵗʰ March):

Forenoon: Introduce Buddy system. Describe your stammer (as it is now) in detail – Iceberg exercise (catalog every related behavior- motor, feelings, primary & secondary behavior); then discuss your iceberg with your partner.

Facilitator presents briefly- what stammering is? Most likely causes? CALMS approach (valsalva mechanism- blow out)

Afternoon: Screen "Courage to speak"- followed by recalling and sharing our experiences as children- Facilitator will facilitate this session to isolate "common" features and will offer insights.

Bouncing & Prolongation Techniques - review and practice (in group, then in pair, then with invited strangers, then in market over next few days); "Internet" assignments

Day 3 (31ˢᵗ March):

Forenoon: Introduce 'Pausing' and 'Voluntary stuttering': rationale, methods and practice.

Video analysis- showing various kinds of dis-fluencies and what it means to stammer easily, effortlessly and nicely..and role of EYE CONTACT and positive body language (videos- Julia Irani, IBN7, Rithik's and other from youtube)

Afternoon: Video exercise in pairs (record each other and then discuss, analyze); video clips.

Day 4 (1st April)-

Forenoon: Recap and Review of the assignments in the plenary group; Block correction techniques (pre, in, post). Practice with buddy, then with invited strangers/ on road/ marketing complex etc.

Afternoon- Screened 'Voices to Remember' a movie and then discussed it.

Day 5 (2nd April) :

Forenoon: Recap and Voluntary stuttering (exercise- "longest / best stutter award") and self admission; benefits of; how to go about it..Innovative ways. Role of humor in healing.
Why Acceptance? Philosophical and practical issues; other attitudinal issues.
Market assignments to Buddies; review of assignments in the night .
Afternoon: movie/ video clips and discussion; self motivation- how to go about it? Role of Goal setting, planning etc.; modern approaches- DAF, Pogoclone: how useful? Is there a cure?

Day 6 (3rd April):

Forenoon: OPD- "Stammering" Interviews; Speaking in a crowd; Review.
Afternoon: Transfer and maintenance- issues: what will most likely happen when you go back? How to deal with relapse? Role of SHG in maintenance? How to start a SHG? Role of self-help in Chronic disorders; helping others- how does it help us?

Exchange contacts, collect your 'Take away' DVDs and other resources. Dispersal by 5.30 pm.

Calms Approach

Calms Approach is a holistic way of looking at stammering, understanding it and learning to manage it. This is an improvement on therapies based on limited understanding of a complex phenomena- "Stammering is a breathing disorder while talking" or "Stammering is a speech disorder" or "Stammering is the result of a psychological conflict". Calms approach views stammering in five dimensions:

Cognitive- how we view and interpret events around us like someone knitting their eyebrow, while listening to us.

Affective: Our emotions intricately associated with speech and related phenomena.

Linguistic: How we construct our thoughts into words, phrases and sentences.

Motor: The actual act of making meaningful sounds- act of speaking

Social: Communication takes place in a social context. Social skills are a part of communication.

(Ref: http://www.mnsu.edu/comdis/isad8/papers/kaufman8.html)

Here are more details of what a self help course should attempt, adapted from the above reference:

Cognitive

   * Increase the participant's understanding of stuttering

    * Education about normal anatomy and physiology of speech production and mechanism

    * Inform peers, family members, etc. about stuttering and its treatment (also Social)

    * Develop consistent "language of fluency", defining terminology of the communication system, of stuttering, of perceptions so that the group is "on the same page."

   * Identify stuttering behaviors

Affective

   * Decrease negative emotions and sensitivity to stuttering
   * Decrease feelings of fear, anxiety and/or tension related to stuttering
   * Increase ability to cope with negative responses by others, including teasing
   * Improve areas of self-esteem and self-confidence
   * Change negative thinking
   * Observe, reflect, probe and validate feelings
   * Increase ability to discuss stuttering with others (also Social)

Linguistic

   * Increase linguistic complexity from concrete to abstract

    * Increase length of utterance from single words to conversation, as level of smooth speech is defined

   * Decrease word avoidance

Motor

    * Identify speech modification and/or fluency shaping techniques

    * Increase practice and use of techniques

    * Define individual strategies for each participant

    * Increase awareness of self-monitoring skills (in all domains)

Social

    * Increase social/pragmatic skills

    * Increase verbal interactions in familiar and unfamiliar situations

•   Increased number of opportunities for the participant to use new skills in realistic speaking activities

Facilitator

Dr Satyendra Srivastava (Sachin) is a Community Health consultant working in voluntary sector for many years. His areas of interest are program evaluation, documentation and research in the Community health context. He lives, with Marian (and two dogs!) near Dehradun. He is fond of trekking, writing and meditation. After being a covert stutterer for many years, he practiced and researched a system of self therapy for PWS, based on acceptance and modern therapy approaches.

Humor, the best medicine

When I was hired to be a technical consultant on the NBC-TV series "Quantum Leap", I was paid $100/hour to work with the actors and screenwriter on portraying stuttering in a positive and clinically accurate way.

After completing my job and with 85 billable hours at $100/hour, I dropped by the Producer's office to present him with the bill and thank him for the job. He looked at the bill and told me that he learned an awful lot from me. I responded by asking him exactly what did he learn from me. The Producer leaned back in his chair, thought for a moment, took a deep puff on his cigar and said, "Ira, I've learned that hereafter when I hire a Stutterer, I won't pay him by the hour."

(Shared by Ira Zimmerman, August 12, 1996, at Kuster's Homepage)

The end