



Adult Chapters

MEETING TOPICS

Chapter meetings are the heart and soul of the National Stuttering Association. The supportive environment that Chapter Leaders foster within meetings provide hope and empowerment to people who stutter. However, developing meeting topics can be difficult and time-consuming, for Chapter Leaders.

The following Meeting Topics were designed to help Chapter Leaders spark meaningful conversation on a range of issues relevant to people who stutter. Each topic briefly outlines an issue and provides either a discussion activity or questions to give attendees something to talk about.

NOTE: There is no requirement for Chapter Leaders to use this guide. These are simply an option to consider if you need a topic for an upcoming meeting.

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MEETING TOPIC

Disclosure: Advertising your Stutter

SITUATION

PWS understand the difficulties of speaking in front of crowds big or small, going through a job interview, conversing when on a date and thousands of other stressful speaking situations. So many thoughts race through our mind when PWS talk in public. These thoughts include:

- How can I minimize my stutter?
- I hope I can say my name without stuttering?
- How will the person I am talking to react to my stutter?
- Will this person laugh at me?
- Will I feel defeated if I stutter more than usual?

A trend that has developed with people who stutter is to “advertise” their stutter when talking to people they’ve just met or when starting a speech or when being interviewed for a job, etc. Advertising one’s stutter is telling others that you stutter.

PURPOSE

Not every PWS is comfortable disclosing their stutter to others. Some PWS are adamantly opposed to advertising their stutter while others freely disclose.

This meeting topic should spark meaningful conversation about the advantages and disadvantages to disclosing one’s stutter. It should also give people an opportunity to develop ways they might advertise their stutter to others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Introduce the concept of “advertising” one’s stutter and then ask the following discussion questions:

1. Who here has advertised their stutter? What happened? How did it feel?
2. For those who do advertise, do you stutter more or less afterwards?
3. What would prevent a PWS from advertising their stutter?
4. What are advantages and disadvantages to advertising your stutter?
5. What are some humorous ways you can disclose your stutter?
6. How do you typically address, if at all, your stutter in a job interview?
7. How might you disclose your stutter when giving a class presentation?
8. When dating, how and when do you disclose your stutter?
9. For those of you who do not practice advertising your stutter, has anything shared today changed your perspective? If so, how?

FURTHER LEARNING

A research paper published in 2017 studied people's perceptions of PWS who self-disclose versus perceptions of PWS who do not self-disclose. The results are fascinating, and they might help to spark more conversation at your meeting.

Participants in this study saw videos of people who stutter reading the same script. Some videos included the PWS saying this non-apologetic disclosure statement before reading the script: "Just so you know, I sometimes stutter, so you might hear me repeat some words, sounds and phrases." Other videos did not include showing the PWS disclosing their stutter.

FINDINGS

People perceived a PWS who self-disclosed as being more friendly, outgoing, and confident than those who did not disclose. Other positive perceptions when a PWS self-disclosed included: being more intelligent, more at ease, more polite, and not ashamed when compared to those who did not disclose.

People also reported that a PWS who self-disclosed their stutter sounded as though they stuttered less, had fewer repetitions of sounds/words and overall had less trouble talking.

A gender bias exists with people rating males who stutter more positively than females who stutter. The authors indicate, "females who stutter may be uniquely vulnerable to being perceived negatively given their membership in a stigmatized gender group coupled with the stigmatization of stuttering."

RESEARCH PAPER:

The Effects of Self-Disclosure on Male and Female Perceptions of Individuals Who Stutter
Courtney T. Byrd, Megann McGill, Zoi Gkalitsiou, and Colleen Cappellinia (2016)

NOTES

MEETING TOPIC

Self-Acceptance and Self-Advocacy



SITUATION

Every PWS is on a journey. Part of this journey is to find an “inner peace” with stuttering. Life is challenging for everyone, but it’s made more challenging when stuttering is involved. In addition to speech therapy and using fluency techniques, many PWS have found that self-acceptance leads to living a richer life.

“Acceptance is a very powerful thing. Finding peace with stuttering is to stutter with grace. What can that mean? Stuttering for me can still be frustrating and annoying but it doesn’t embarrass me or make me feel like a less accomplished person. In fact, in accepting stuttering, I find myself feeling proud to be strong, to be a person who perseveres with this challenge that I am forced to wear on my sleeve.”

– Sarah D’Agostino

“When you began accepting your stuttering, you didn’t give in or give up, but rather began being the person you wanted to be despite your stuttering.”

– Dr. Lee Reeves

Advocating for oneself is also an important step in the journey of a PWS. Every day PWS face situations where they must stand up for themselves so that their voice can be heard and that their unique talents can be appreciated.

PURPOSE

Everyone who stutters is on a different journey in finding self-acceptance and practicing self-advocacy. This meeting topic should open up conversation so that PWS further down this journey can help those who are just starting or perhaps yet to start their journey.

ACTIVITY

Engage the group in conversation by introducing the topic of Self-Acceptance and Self-Advocacy by sharing the definitions below. Have attendees share where they are in their personal journey to find acceptance and to advocate for themselves.

Self-Acceptance is an invitation to stop trying to change yourself into the person you wish to be. Instead, it’s being comfortable with the person you have become.

Self-Advocacy is when you speak or act on your own behalf to improve your quality of life, affect personal change, and or correct inequalities you’ve encountered.

The following is a role-playing activity that was first used by the Boston Chapter. Other Chapters have used this activity to foster thought-provoking conversation.

Read each scenario and discuss as a group how you would advocate for yourself or those affected. (You can also print these scenarios on cards and hand them out to attendees.)

You are ordering a cup of coffee and the barista asks for your name. You begin to block. The barista says, “Did you forget your name?” What do you do next?

You’re on a blind date and conversation starts. How do you talk about your stuttering to make them understand it in the best possible way?

You are on a job interview. The job involves talking with people in-person and on the phone. You advertise your stutter and your prospective employer says, “Do you think you can handle the job having a stutter?” How do you respond?

You get pulled over by a police officer. He begins to ask you questions and you block. He looks at you funny and asks if you okay. What’s your response?

You call your credit card company and the customer service representative asks you to read the numbers on your card. You stutter on the first number. You tell the person that you stutter and they say, “That’s okay. I stutter too.” Knowing this person doesn’t stutter, how do you respond?

You are out with your friends and one of them keeps finishing your sentences. How do you explain to them this is something that they shouldn’t do?

You are buying a large item from a hardware store and you notice the person helping you load the box in your car stutters. Do you acknowledge their stutter? If so, what do you say? If not, why not?

It’s Stuttering Awareness Week, how do you help your friends on social media understand stuttering?

NOTES



MEETING TOPIC

Portrayals of Stuttering in the Media and Popular Culture

SITUATION

Movies and television shows rarely present PWS as smart, successful, and confident. Instead, PWS are portrayed as being meek, incompetent, and undeserving. PWS are also far too often used as comic relief in scenes and as the punchline to jokes.

Seeing a character in a movie or TV show can be the first-time people experience stuttering. In these instances, perception sadly becomes reality because this is where the stigma of stuttering starts to take root with people.

PURPOSE

It's alarming to see just how PWS are portrayed in popular culture. During this meeting emotions will be stirred with everyone in attendance. Emotions will range from anger to sadness and from being hopeless to hopeful. While these conversations may be difficult, they are necessary for PWS to address in their journey of understanding and acceptance.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

For this meeting you will need access to the internet from a computer, tablet or smartphone to watch an online video. This video shares a variety of scenes where PWS are portrayed in movies and TV shows. (The bigger your screen, the better the meeting will be. You'll need to plan ahead for how best to show the video at your meeting.)

Which movie/s did you choose? Why?

MEETING TOPIC

Relationships and Dating



SITUATION

Navigating relationships and dating can be difficult for anyone, including PWS. When first starting a relationship, some PWS may choose to be “covert” with their stutter and not disclose right away. Others may mention it early and stutter openly from the beginning. It’s a very personal choice for PWS to decide what they share with someone regarding stuttering and their personal feelings towards it. Addressing one’s stutter can be a very emotional topic and often difficult to gauge a reaction from the other person.

PURPOSE

One of the biggest issues PWS have is addressing their stutter when starting a relationship and throughout the dating journey. First impressions matter greatly when dating and lasting impressions matter greatly when a romantic relationship matures. This meeting topic should open up a discussion of how disclosing and having an open conversation regarding stuttering can affect different aspects throughout the life of a relationship.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

When do you think is a good time to disclose stuttering to someone you are dating? Is it on the first date? Is it on your online dating profile? When is the best time?

How do you describe what stuttering is to someone you are dating or building a relationship with?

Suppose someone responds negatively or oddly to your stutter when you first mention it or when you first stutter significantly. How do you respond?

There comes a time in a relationship when you “Meet the Parents.” What are some ways PWS can best handle this stressful situation?

Your relationship partner wants to be supportive of you and your stutter. When is it appropriate and appreciated, if ever, for your partner to “jump in” and finish your sentences? (Think ordering at a restaurant and introducing yourself in social settings.)

At some point a relationship will evolve into marriage territory. For a PWS, how difficult do you think it will be to ask someone to marry you or to answer someone who’s asked to be your lifelong partner?

It’s wedding day. Dating is done. A lifelong relationship is to begin. As a PWS, does reciting wedding vows in front of attendees scare you? For a PWS who has endured that time, what’s your best advice for how to handle reciting wedding vows?



MEETING TOPIC

Surviving the Holidays

SITUATION

The Holidays can be an exhausting and stressful time for countless reasons. Your to-do list is endless. You've got Holiday parties to attend and office parties to tolerate. Awkward family get-togethers can make you uneasy. Spending time with your parents and with the parents of your significant other can make you uptight. There are also the unrealistic self-imposed expectations that your Holidays *MUST* be perfect. And, feelings of loneliness can consume you despite all the togetherness. Oh yeah, layer on a stutter and the intensity of surviving the Holidays is magnified.

PURPOSE

PWS need time to discuss and learn ways to make their Holidays less stressful. This meeting should encourage conversation and the sharing of ideas people use to minimize their stress and maximize their enjoyment of the Holidays.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

Introduce this activity by having attendees share their favorite Holiday memory.

Next, give each attendee a notecard (or blank piece of paper) and a pen. Have attendees write down two things that give them stress during the Holidays. Go around the room and have people share what they wrote. Ask follow-up questions to learn how stuttering impacts the Holiday activities that give them stress.

Now it's time to explore ways to reduce Holiday stress for PWS. Have attendees turn over their notecard (or piece of paper) and write down one thing they are going to do to help make their Holidays less stressful. Have everyone share their piece of advice.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

If conversation is slow, use the following questions to spark group discussion:

- When you are at a Holiday party with people who do not know you stutter, how do you, if at all, advertise your stutter?
- Suppose someone at a party innocently laughs when you stutter, how do you respond?
- Is small talk easy for you? Or, do you prefer to have deeper conversations with people?
- As a PWS, do you stutter more around your parents and family than your friends? If so, why do you think that happens.
- Why do we have this feeling that our Holidays must be perfect and special?
- What's a Holiday tradition you and or your family do every year?
- If you were given a Holiday miracle of being 100% fluent forever, would you accept that gift?

MEETING TOPIC

Overcoming Fears



SITUATION

Fear is a powerful force. It can scare you. It can influence the decisions you make. It can cause you to react irrationally. And, it can prevent you from growing into the person you aspire to become.

Fear comes in a variety of ways. Some terrifying. Some not. Fear of snakes. Fear of flying. Fear of crowds. Fear of small spaces. Fear of heights. Fear of clowns. Fear of dogs.

Fear can spark a flight or fight response within you. The flight response triggers actions to avoid a stressful situation. The fight response motivates you to overcome a challenging situation.

PURPOSE

For a PWS, a paralyzing fear can be sparked from all sorts of speaking situations. The ring of a telephone. The drive-thru window. The job interview. The classroom presentation. This meeting should explore the various fears PWS are facing, have faced and have overcome in order to grow into the person they aspired to become.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

What fears did you have as a child that you were able to overcome when you became an adult? How did you overcome those fears?

Do you believe that fear makes us human? Why or why not?

Talk about a time in your adult life when you did something that you feared doing. How did you feel afterwards?

Can fear be healthy? If so, how?

Do you know anyone who is fearless? If so, tell us about this person.

What is your worst fear today? Is that fear sparking a fight or flight response from you?

What do you fear more failure or success?

If you didn't stutter, how differently would you approach fear in life?

Think back to your childhood and adolescence. What advice would you, as an adult, give to your younger self as it relates to overcoming fears?



MEETING TOPIC

The Struggle of Covert Stuttering

SITUATION

Many people who stutter (PWS) do their best to live life as someone who speaks fluently. They stutter covertly by finding ways to disguise their repetitions, prolongations, or blocks. While they may show few visible signs of disfluency, covert stutterers experience very similar struggles in life that “overt” stutterers face.

Covert stutterers choose to live their life hiding their stuttering by:

- Avoiding situations that may include speaking
- Circling their speech around feared sounds and purposely swapping difficult words
- Not expressing their true thoughts and choosing to remain quiet when they desperately want to speak, resulting in being perceived as “non-assertive”
- Choosing a career path with minimal speaking requirements

PURPOSE

This meeting topic should spark conversations about identifying ways stuttering could be hidden. This discussion will prompt people to self-evaluate their position on the covert/overt spectrum of stuttering.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Introduce the concept of “covert stuttering” and then ask the following discussion questions:

- Do PWS sometimes try to pass as “fluent”?
- What humorous ways have you tried to avoid/hide stuttering?
- What happens when PWS speak their mind and stutter, instead of holding back?
- Do PWS lose their train of thought when trying to avoid the stutter/block?
- In what ways could covert stuttering repress one’s true personality?
- What methods do some PWS use to avoid the fear of discovery that they stutter?
- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages for a covert stutterer to be open about their stuttering in the workplace?
- How could the social life of an open PWS be different than a covert PWS?

FURTHER LEARNING

- Peter Reitzes, StutterTalk podcast host, [discusses his life as a covert stutterer](#) and why at age 23 he decided to face stuttering openly.
- Tiffani Kittilstved, SLP and PWS, writes about her experience living a majority of her life hiding her stutter: [Covert Stuttering: A Journey to Acceptance](#).

MEETING TOPIC

Stuttering and Managing Stress



SITUATION

Everyone has stress, it's a normal part of life. A recent Gallup poll revealed 80% of Americans frequently or sometimes feel stress in their everyday life while only 4% said they never feel stress. You can feel stress in your body when you simply have too much to do. You can also feel stress when you worry about things like your job, money, or relationships. As people who stutter, many of us also feel added stress with a variety of difficult speaking situations. Thoughts about how people will react when you stutter can overwhelm us and intensify an already stressful situation.

Managing and feeling less stress is achievable. By taking steps to manage our stress, it will put you in charge and give you a sense of control, which can lead to enhanced self-esteem and can change the way we think about and enter into daily situations.

PURPOSE

This meeting topic should inspire open sharing and conversation about the advantages of managing stress in one's life. The group activities will strengthen relationships between attendees and serve as a way to learn new skills to handle stress in your everyday life.

NOTE: Reducing stress takes time and effort but working on these together does provide additional reinforcement and supports the NSA's motto of "If You Stutter, You're Not Alone."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions will spark group conversation about the stresses we feel and how we handle stress in our life.

- What causes stress and tension in your life?
- What effect does stress have on your life and your stutter?
- What causes you more stress: focusing on how the listener reacts to your stutter or focusing on how you try to control your stutter when talking?
- Identify stressful situations that are beyond your control and those are within your control.
- What activities make you feel happy? And, how often do you do them?
- What activities make you feel relaxed? And, how often do you do them?
- Do you have a support system of friends/family that will help you make positive changes? If so, how do they support you?

GROUP ACTIVITIES

#1 | SPEAKING CIRCLES*

Each attendee takes a turn **STANDING** in front of the group for two minutes in **COMPLETE SILENCE**.

During your silent standing time, you will focus on what it feels like to stand before the group, get comfortable in their space, maintain eye contact with them and move through any uncomfortable stressful feelings you or the audience might have. [Repeat if time permits. You will definitely feel the difference of practicing.]

(By taking time to get acquainted with our environment and the audience, we gain greater self-awareness and feelings of being in control. This will allow us to enter speaking situations with more confidence.)

* This activity is based upon “Speaking Circles” popularized by John Harrison

#2 | STRESS BALLS

For this activity you will need to purchase a large assortment of inexpensive foam stress balls. (These can be found at most dollar stores.)

Have attendees stand and form a circle. Each circle should ideally have between 5 and 8 people. Give each circle one stress ball to begin. Have the first person toss the ball to someone else, remembering who they tossed it to. The next person tosses it to someone who has not had the ball yet, remembering who they tossed it to. The third person tosses it to someone who has not had the ball yet, remembering who they tossed it to. This continues until everyone has had the ball, and it returns to the first person who started.

The pattern is repeated (each person always tossing it to the same person) until it is remembered easily. Each person only needs to remember who they toss the stress ball to and who they receive it from.

Once the group remembers the pattern easily, they introduce more balls into the same pattern, with the first person tossing one stress ball, then another, then another, to the same person, who then passes on each ball to the next person in the pattern. With five or six balls going at a time, it becomes quite a circus with a lot of laughing!

DISCUSSION: After about five minutes, have everyone sit down and identify what they can learn from the activity (besides it being hard to keep all the balls in the air!). What did they learn in order to be successful in the activity? How many people had wayward and idle thoughts in their head while doing the activity?

(Be sure to point out that life is like the activity—we all juggle many things at one time, and if we are not focused, things get dropped! If we focus too much on the past or present, the stress balls will pound and bombard us if we are not alert.)

#3 | CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES

Stress can keep you from feeling your best – mentally, physically and emotionally. With almost every stressful situation, there isn't anything tangible that causes stress. Instead, it's memories of a tough situation, a negative response, and projecting if it "will happen again" that produces stress in our bodies. This activity will help us understand where stress comes from.

First, ask participants to think about something that gives them stress. Then for about five minutes, have people think about the various consequences and reactions that might take place from those stressful activities. (You may need to give the group directions to intensify/focus their thinking.)

All of a sudden say, STOP THINKING.

Then, begin a group discussion by asking participants how they feel. Close the discussion by asking if any of the consequences and negative reactions happened yet?

NOTE: As people who stutter, we do experience stressful and sometimes negative situations that can cause us to project into the future. We remember when someone mimics us, fills in our words, or laughs at us. Yet, not all of our situations are negative and so stress in some cases is in our minds and starts with our memories. The important step here is to catch ourselves when we start to produce stressful thoughts and remind yourself that nothing has happened yet.

FURTHER LEARNING

[Stress Management Activities](#) from the WorkSmart blog.

[Three Tips to Manage Stress](#) from the American Heart Association.

NOTES



MEETING TOPIC:

Finding Humor in Stuttering

SITUATION

People who stutter have had to endure light-hearted teasing, mocking and malicious insults. Sadly, most PWS has been laughed at some point(s) throughout their life. It's not fun and the sting from such ordeals may last a lifetime.

Self-awareness of emotional reactions towards humor or laughing about stuttering may be an indicator of one's progress towards accepting their stutter. Also knowing HOW to react in the future may eliminate creating harmful memories.

PURPOSE

This meeting topic is designed to cause PWS to revisit some painful memories in hopes of developing new ways to react inwardly and outwardly when experiencing laughter as it relates to stuttering.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Can anyone think of a time that someone laughed at their stuttering, from a place of superiority or attempting to gain an edge (e.g. business setting)? How did you handle it? How will you handle it differently in the future?

Has anyone laughed along with being teased about stuttering, hoping to make it go away, or as an attempt to disguise the hurt? Did it work?

Are we more sensitive to teasing about stuttering, than say another physical feature or characteristic? Why do you think that is?

Is it OK when YOU joke about stuttering, sometimes with self-deprecating humor? If so, why? If not, why not?

Does anyone have a favorite ice breaker joke when disclosing their stuttering?

How does everyone respond when someone's attempt at humor feels like ridicule or teasing?

How do you feel when you hear jokes about stuttering? Does it make a difference if the person telling the joke stutters?

COMEDIANS WHO STUTTER

There are a handful of comedians who stutter. They focus much of their material on stuttering, people's reactions to stuttering, the false stereotypes of stuttering and more.

Watch the following YouTube video clips to spark further conversation about stuttering and humor.

Nina G. is America's only female stand-up comedian who stutters. In this clip, Nina G. talks about some dos and don'ts when talking to a person who stutters. [WATCH NINA G.](#)

Drew Lynch gained fame as a stand-up comedian after appearing in the 10th season of "America's Got Talent." Drew developed his stutter at the age of 20 when he was hit in the head with a softball. In this clip, Drew talks about stuttering, dating, and turtle shells.

[WATCH DREW](#)

Jody Fuller is a comic, speaker, writer, and soldier with three tours of duty in Iraq. He also stutters. In this clip, Jody performs his stand-up routine for the troops of the First Stryker Brigade in Sammarah, Iraq. [WATCH JODY](#)

FURTHER LEARNING

VIDEO: [Made Fun Of? Ridiculed? Use this Trick to Come Out on Top and Never Be Laughed at Again!](#)

ARTICLE: [The Nature of Laughing at Ourselves](#)

ARTICLE: [The Benefit of Laughing at Ourselves, According to Science](#)

NOTES

MEETING TOPIC

Stuttering and Social Anxiety



SITUATION

According to research, there is a high rate of social anxiety among adults who stutter. Social anxiety is the fear of being judged negatively by others which can lead to feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, self-consciousness, embarrassment, humiliation, and depression.

People with social anxiety typically avoid situations where they are the center of attention, meet new people, interact with a person in an authoritative role, speak in front of large crowds and many other everyday life situations. Avoiding these situations can have a negative impact on someone's educational achievement, job performance, personal relationships, and overall quality of life.

PURPOSE

Talking about social anxieties can be uncomfortable. This meeting topic will get people outside of their comfort zone to look within themselves to gain a deeper understanding of life situations they are avoiding because of their stutter. Through group discussion, attendees will hopefully gain inspiration, confidence, and a greater comfort level to reduce social anxieties in their life.

ACTIVITY

Give each meeting attendee a notecard and pen. Have people list three life situations they avoid and or fear most. Then have each attendee share their list and encourage follow-up discussion within the group. As the meeting facilitator, write down common avoidance situations and themes that are discussed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. By a show of hands, who in this room feels as though they suffer from some level of social anxiety?
2. When did you first start to feel you were being judged by others because of your stutter?
3. How has your social anxiety changed over the years from when you were a child to now being an adult?
4. How does attending these monthly meetings help you feel better about being a person who stutters?
5. What are ways you try to lessen the fear of speaking situations?
6. Take a look at the three life situations you wrote down as avoiding or fearing most, what's one situation you plan to focus on in the upcoming weeks?

Special thanks and recognition to the NSA Buffalo Chapter for this Meeting Topic



MEETING TOPIC

Giving Impromptu Presentations

SITUATION

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, public speaking anxiety affects nearly 75% of people. There are many reasons why people fear speaking in public. One of the main reasons is that when you are in the spotlight with all eyes on you as the audience listens to your every word, it can spark feelings of anxiety and nervousness.

The fear of public speaking can impact various aspects of your personal and professional life. From giving a toast at a wedding reception to answering a question at a large dinner table to presenting a project in a boardroom, speaking in front of others is something we all must do. Speaking to small and large groups is necessary for us to grow socially and professionally.

PURPOSE

The goal of this meeting topic is to give attendees an opportunity to conquer their fear of public speaking by giving an impromptu presentation on a topic they've not had time to rehearse.

ACTIVITY

- Explain to your meeting attendees that they will have a chance to give a two-minute (max) presentation in front of everyone.
- For each topic, the presenter should stand up in front of the group, maintain eye contact and answer a question with an impromptu response.
- After each presentation, have the others in the group share what they liked about the short talk.
- Begin the activity by asking for a volunteer.
- Once the volunteer is standing in front of the group, give them one of the impromptu speaking topics listed below.

TOPICS

- What's worse: failing, or never trying?
- What's your most beloved childhood memory?
- When you close your eyes, what do you see?
- Is it possible to lie without saying a word?
- If we learn from our mistakes, why are we always so afraid to make a mistake?
- Who do you trust and why?
- If your life was a novel, what would be the title and how would your story end?
- What do you do to deliberately impress others?

MEETING TOPIC

Speed Friending



SITUATION

It's important to encourage friendships to happen outside of chapter meetings. We meet every month on the same day and time, but how many of us get-together on days we do not have a meeting?

Developing friendships not only helps us to be more social, but it also helps us with finding other people on which we can call when we need help or just want to share a funny story with. One can never have too many friends.

PURPOSE

Everyone who attends a local chapter meeting has one thing in common: stuttering. Some of us stutter, others may be loved ones of people who stutter, and some attending meetings are speech therapists. However, we're bound to have more things in common than just stuttering, and this meeting activity will get attendees learning more about each other in a super-fast way. Welcome to Speed Friending!

ACTIVITY

For this activity, you will need to arrange chairs so that two people can have a conversation face-to-face. (Depending on the size of your group, you may need to get creative with this.)

- Go around the room and have each attendee count off 1-2, 1-2 until everyone is either a 1 or a 2.
- Have all the 2s find a chair to sit in.
- Next, have all the 1s sit a chair facing the other person.
- Set a timer for 3 to 5 minutes. (Larger groups will want to set the timer for 3 mins.)
- Tell everyone to have a conversation.
- Start with all the 1s asking a question to the person they are facing.
- Then, have the 2s ask a question.
- From there conversation should flow naturally.
- After the timer goes off, have all the 2s stay seated and have the 1s get up and sit down to talk to a different person.
- Repeat until everybody has had a chance to talk with everyone.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Gather as a large group and share thoughts about the conversations that took place. A few discussion questions to ask are:

- What was the experience like meeting and talking with everyone?
- Did it get easier or more difficult as the activity went on?
- Was the funniest story you heard?
- What surprised you the most?
- For those who stutter, how did you feel talking with the time restraints?
- Close the group discussion by starting with a volunteer. Have the volunteer say something they admire about the person to their left. Continue around the room until everyone has spoken.

NOTES



MEETING TOPIC

Power Posing: Build Confidence and Assertiveness

SITUATION

Body language matters. It can influence how we feel about ourselves, impact our confidence levels, and so much more. People who stutter can sometimes convey unique messages through their body language and facial expressions when they are talking and when they are either standing or sitting.

PURPOSE

The goal of this meeting topic is to give attendees a greater understanding of how their body language and facial expressions influence their ability to feel confident and be assertive.

ACTIVITY

note: For this activity you will need to watch a short from YouTube.

Ann Cuddy is a social psychologist who has helped to popularize a concept known as “Power Posing.” In her studies, Ann has found that when people hold a “power pose” for a short period of time, it can lead to increased confidence and assertiveness. This change of body language has helped people to enter challenging situations with a sense of power, courage, and fearlessness.

[Watch this short video](#) (3:30) where Ann discusses her personal story and the science behind “power posing.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Can you relate to Ann overcoming adversity in her life? If so, how?
- Briefly explain the differences between a low-power pose and a high-power pose.
- Have everyone in the group take on a low-power pose for at least 1 minute.
- Discuss how each person felt during their low-power pose.
- Ask for volunteers to individually take on their low-power pose in front of the group.
- Ask each person why they chose that low-power pose.
- Now, have everyone in the group take on a high-power pose for at least 1 minute.
- Discuss how each person felt during their high-power pose.
- Next, ask for volunteers to individually take on their high-power pose in front of the group.
- Ask each person why they chose that high-power pose.
- To close the discussion, go around the room and have people share situations in which they could benefit from taking on a high-power pose.

MEETING TOPIC



Stuttering and our Digital Devices

SITUATION

Technology continues to dramatically impact every aspect of our daily lives. Our smartphones are powerful computers that have revolutionized how we communicate, shop, watch, read, learn, and much more. Some days we may text more than we talk. We use apps to complete a variety of tasks. Let's admit, we would be lost without our smartphone.

And it's not just smartphones that are having a massive impact on society. Social media has redefined how we find new friends and how we keep in touch with old friends. Voice recognition technology gives us the ability to do so many things hands-free. The ability to have the world's information at our fingertips is beyond revolutionary.

However, for people who stutter, is our reliance on digital devices more hurtful than helpful? Is choosing to text someone rather calling them helpful? Is using an app to order food rather than talking on the phone helpful? Do voice recognition devices like Amazon's Echo and Google's Home best serve people who stutter? There's lots to talk about with stuttering and our digital devices.

PURPOSE

This topic will spark meaningful conversations about the advantages and disadvantages people who stutter face with using our digital devices.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What were some of the biggest game-changing and awe-inspiring technology advances when you were younger?
- Talk about the first time you used a computer. When was it? How did you use the computer? Did you first use 5¼ inch floppy disks, 3¼ inch floppy disks, CDs, digital downloads?
- Compare your first cellphone to your current smartphone. What's changed? What's stayed the same?
- Why is that answering phone calls and making calls are common situations that people who stutter find difficult and try to avoid?
- What are your favorite apps and how do they make your life better?
- Discuss the positives and negatives to texting people rather than calling people.
- Does anyone use talk-to-text? If so, how does your stuttering affect it?
- Raise your hand if you use voice recognition devices like Amazon's Echo, Apple's Siri and/or Google's Home? Do you stutter more or less using it? For those that stutter more, how frustrating of an experience is it?
- What are some disabilities people have that would make using voice recognition devices difficult?
- How can tech companies improve their voice recognition devices to make it easier for people who stutter to use them?

MEETING TOPIC

Is Stuttering a Disability?



SITUATION

People who stutter (PWS) face stigmas in all areas of life. Assumptions are sometimes made about the abilities of PWS based solely on their disfluency. PWS can be viewed as being less capable, non-assertive, shy, erratic, and less intelligent than the fluent population. These stigmas form the basis for stereotypes, which can lead to prejudice and discrimination.

One area where prejudice and discrimination can be experienced is in the workplace. Research tell us:

- More than 70% of PWS believe stuttering decreases their chances of being hired or promoted.
- More than 33% of PWS believe stuttering interferes with their job performance.
- 20% of PWS report being turned down for a job or promotion because of their stuttering.

source: Klein, J.F. & Hood, S.B., The Impact of Stuttering on Employment Opportunities and Job Performance, *J. Fluency Disorders*, 29, 255-273 (2004).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects the rights of people who stutter. According to the ADA, “A person has a disability if he/she has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.” Verbal communication is a major life activity, which means stuttering is a disability.

Within the stuttering community, the word ‘disability’ is divisive. Some PWS are comfortable with stuttering being a disability while other PWS are not at all comfortable with stuttering being a disability.

PURPOSE

This meeting topic should spark significant conversation and polarizing points-of-view. Attendees will also have the opportunity to share their personal experiences of prejudice and discrimination based upon their stuttering.

NOTE: This topic is controversial and there are many legal nuances to how the ADA protects PWS through having employers provide “reasonable accommodations” for PWS. To learn more about this topic, [please review expert advice from the Job Accommodation Network](#).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Has anyone ever been discriminated against at work or school because of their stutter? If yes, what was the situation and how did it make you feel?
- Do you believe stuttering decreases your chances of being hired or being promoted? Explain why.
- How does stuttering interfere, if at all, with how you carry out daily responsibilities at work or school?
- Do you consider stuttering to be a disability? If yes, explain why. If no, also explain why.
- Talk about the advantages and disadvantages to checking the box for being “disabled” on a job application?
- Have you ever asked for an accommodation at work? If yes, explain the situation and the accommodation.
- Do you find yourself talking about stuttering at work or school? If yes, how have those conversations impact people’s perception of you?



MEETING TOPIC

Improv Fun & Games

SITUATION

It's common for people who stutter (PWS) to fear speaking situations. It's also common for PWS to spend silent 'mind time' thinking of what words they will say to try and not stutter. PWS spend a lot of time thinking before speaking.

Imagine being in a situation where it's best to say the first thing that comes to your mind. That situation is improv and one of the ground rules in improv is to say words that immediately come to your mind. The other improvisers must play along with whatever is said in the moment. Together, all the improvisers build upon whatever is expressed verbally through speaking and non-verbally through physical actions.

Living in the moment is the beauty of improv. Don't think, just speak. Don't plan, just act. With improv, you must trust that whatever you say or do will add to the scene. Many PWS have found that developing the skill of "living in the moment" helps them to gain a greater comfort in everyday speaking situations.

PURPOSE

This meeting will be a combination of laughter, listening, and learning. Attendees will play improv games and gain a basic understanding of how "living in the moment" by spontaneously talking is an incredibly freeing feeling.

GROUP ACTIVITY

For the following improv games, it's best to be in an open space with plenty of room for people to move around. Create an imaginary stage and have attendees stand on the outside of the stage. If your group is larger than 12 people, then you may need to get creative on how you use your space.

#1 | "Yes! Let's...!"

Have the group space out in the open area. Explain that everyone will be acting out an activity. This activity begins when someone starts by saying something like, "Let's... put up the dishes." Everyone in the group says, "Yes! Let's put up the dishes" and they start moving their body as if they were putting up the dishes. After a few moments have someone say something new like, "Let's... do yoga." The group replies, "Yes! Let's do yoga" and everyone does a few yoga poses. Continue until everyone has had a chance to start a "Yes! Let's..." activity.

#2 | One Word at a Time

Get the group to form a circle in the middle of the open space. Tell them they are going to be composing a story one word at a time. Attendees must listen as the story develops and build upon what has been previously said. Start by having everyone say, "Once a upon a time..." and then someone should begin the story from there. After

the first person has spoken the first word to the story, go in a clockwise direction with each person building upon the story one word at a time. Continue the story until there is a natural ending. Repeat until you think the group would like to move on to a different game.

#3 | Expert Panel

This game requires 4 players. 1 player is the host and 3 players form a panel. If you have chairs, get the players to place three chairs together and place the fourth chair slightly to the side. Assign each panelist with a role to play. All panelists are “experts” however, you will assign one panelist to give “great” advice, another panelist to give “good” advice, and the third panelist to give outrageously “bad” advice.

Have the players take a seat and have the other attendees either sit or stand outside of the imaginary stage to serve as the audience. Next, ask the audience for a suggestion that the panelists are experts in. Then, turn it over to the host to do a mock television show about the suggested topic. The host will ask each panelist the same question to get three different answers. One answer should be “great” advice, another answer “good” advice and the third answer should be outrageously “bad” advice. The host can also involve the audience to ask questions of the panelists.

#4 | String of Pearls

This is another storytelling game where players tell a story out of order, one sentence at a time. Clear the imaginary stage and have one player go to the far left of the stage and begin the story with a sentence. Next, have one player go to the far right of the stage and end the story with one sentence. Instruct the next player to go to the middle of the stage and say a sentence that serves as the middle of the story.

One-by-one each player on the outside of the stage will fill in a space and build upon the story with a sentence, trying to bring things together and end up with a story that makes complete sense. Every time a new line is added, the players go down the string and repeat their lines first to last. Continue until all players are on the stage and the story is complete.

GROUP ACTIVITY

- How did it feel to speak spontaneously by living in the moment?
- Which game was the most fun to play and why?
- What were some challenging moments during the games?
- Talk about the need to pay attention and the importance of listening throughout each game?
- How did your stuttering influence your ability to participate?
- What are some ways you can use the improv in everyday life?

MEETING TOPIC

Jobs and Careers for People Who Stutter



SITUATION

People who stutter (PWS) understand the difficulties of searching and applying for jobs, whether it's in person or online. So many thoughts race through our mind when PWS search and apply for jobs. These thoughts include: I hope this job doesn't involve too much talking. Will my stuttering help or hinder me during the job interview? If I get the job, how will my co-workers react to my stuttering?

Effective verbal communication skills is usually a key requirement listed in job descriptions. It is important for PWS to think about and evaluate how one feels about their stutter and if their stutter plays a role in all of the requirements listed in the job description.

PURPOSE

Not every PWS thinks about if and/or how their stutter effects the type of jobs they are searching and/or applying to. This meeting topic should spark meaningful conversations about if and/or how their stutter effects the type of jobs that are searching and/or applying.

ACTIVITY

The "Guess Who" Game

This activity will explore thoughts on how stuttering may affect one's ability to perform a job.

Hand out post-it notes and pens to each attendee. Have each person write down a job title (whether it be their own job, a job they are applying for, or a dream job) and place it in a hat or a small box. Each person will draw a post-it notes from the box and **WITHOUT LOOKING** at the sticky note, place it on their forehead.

Have one person stand up or stand in the center of a circle surrounded by other attendees. The person standing will ask questions related to how much stuttering effects this particular job title. The goal is for the person standing to ask enough questions in order to correctly guess the job title that's stuck on their forehead. Continue this activity until every person has had an opportunity to guess the job title on their forehead. (Larger groups may need to break into smaller groups.)

DISCUSSION

- What were some key takeaways learned about each job discussed and if/and or how stuttering relates to one's ability to perform the job?
- When reviewing job descriptions, what are some listed requirements and job responsibilities that cause PWS to doubt themselves?
- Has someone talked themselves out of applying for a job or going into a career field because of their stutter. If so, what was the job/career?
- If stuttering were a non-issue, would you be in the job/career you are in today?

MEETING TOPIC

Job Interview Skills



SITUATION

One of the most challenging experiences people who stutter (PWS) face is interviewing for a job. Effective verbal communication skills are on full display when interviewing for a job. It is a test of confidence and determination whether done over the telephone, in-person or through online video. This is a stressful situation for anyone, but it can be more stressful for a PWS.

PURPOSE

The mastery of job interviewing takes practice. One must practice building confidence about expressing their abilities and capabilities for the job. The ability to confidently and effectively communicate one's skills and abilities is a hallmark of a successful job interview.

This meeting topic should spark meaningful conversations on what confident and effective job interview techniques are for PWS through role-play activity and group discussion.

ACTIVITY

Job Interview Role-Play

Divide meeting attendees into groups of two, making one person the “Interviewee” and the other person the “Hiring Manager.” Have the Interviewee and the Hiring Manager sit across from each other. The Hiring Manager will ask the following four questions to the Interviewee. After doing one interview, reverse roles and do another interview.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What's one accomplishment, job or school-related, that you are proud of achieving?
3. Talk about a time when you have failed in doing something? How are you different because of that experience?
4. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What were some initial feelings about the interview experience?
- What are some ways a PWS can overcome nervousness and stress during a job interview?
- Who disclosed or talked about their stutter in the interview? How did it feel?
- Was anyone uncomfortable talking about their stutter? If so, why?
- Has anyone in a real job interview talked about their stutter? If so, how did you bring it up? How did the interviewee respond?
- What are pros and cons to disclosing your stutter throughout the job search process?
- What are some thoughts an interviewee/employer can have about hiring a PWS?



MEETING TOPIC

Overcoming Self-Stigma to Achieve Career Goals

SITUATION

The general public holds certain beliefs about people who stutter based solely on their disfluency. Research studies tell us the stigma is real. The public believes people who stutter are non-assertive, unsociable, insecure, nervous, tense, shy, anxious, and afraid.

This stigma extends beyond character traits to beliefs at how capable a PWS is on the job. Research studies indicate people who stutter are viewed in the workplace as being less intelligent, less educated, and less competent. These stereotypes are damaging personally and professionally to people who stutter.

But, just as damaging is the self-stigma that affects many people who stutter. Self-stigma is all that negative self-talk that happens when people who stutter believe those stereotypes and attach them to themselves. When PWS accept these negative stereotypes to be true, they can feel unworthy and possibly prevent a PWS from doing things, including jobs, that require lots of talking.

PURPOSE

Everyone who stutters must confront both the public stigma and the self-stigma that exists. While a person who stutters cannot fully control the public stigma he or she will face, they can attempt to overcome self-sabotaging behavior that's a result from falling victim to self-stigma issues. This meeting will bring up deep rooted emotions and hopefully, motivate people who stutter to feel worthy and capable of achieving their career goals.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Has anyone experienced being discriminated against because of your stutter? If so, what was the situation? How did it make you feel? What, if anything, did you do to move past that negative experience?
- Do you agree or disagree with this statement: Self-doubt erodes self-confidence. Explain why or why not.
- Are there any jobs where a person's disfluency should disqualify them from doing the job?
- What was your dream job as a child? What's your dream job today? (Discuss how fluency plays a role in those dream jobs.)

ACTIVITY

Give each attendee a notecard (or a blank piece of paper) and a pen. Have attendees write down 3 things they are proud of accomplishing personally and/or career-wise. Go around the room and have people share what they wrote. Ask follow-up questions to learn how stuttering impacted a person's ability to achieve their accomplishments. (In people's answers, notice if they were able to overcome negative self-talk issues to achieve what they did. If so, discuss it.)

Next, have attendees turn over their notecard (or piece of paper) and write down one thing they are going to challenge themselves to do to either get their dream job or to further excel in their current job.

MEETING TOPIC

Delivering Successful Presentations



SITUATION

People who stutter understand the difficulties of speaking in front of groups, small and large. Presenting at work can be particularly stressful because we often have that inner chatter that tells us we aren't good enough; people will judge us and we will not be understood.

Presentations at work can take many forms. You may be asked to make an impromptu update about the project you've been working on during a staff meeting. You may be asked to deliver a report on sales figures and goals during a weekly or monthly conference call. You may also be asked to plan and deliver an in-service training session on a trending topic in the workplace.

Whatever the format, with advance notice or not, we have to be ready. We cannot let our stuttering, our fear of stuttering, nor listener reactions to how we speak hold us back from making presentations at work.

PURPOSE

This meeting topic should spark helpful conversation about the emotions we feel when giving presentations and how best to prepare for most any type of speaking opportunity at work.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Introduce the topic of Delivering Successful Presentations and then ask the following discussion questions:

1. Who here has presented recently at work or anywhere for that matter? How did it go?
2. For those who have given a recent presentation, did you advertise your stuttering before speaking? If so, what did you say? How did you feel? If not, why not?
3. List as many types of "presentations" people give at work? ("Presentations" go beyond the expected to the unexpected ranging from introducing yourself on a conference call to one-on-one conversations with your boss to almost any speaking situation.)
4. What type of feedback have you received after giving a work presentation?
5. How do you prepare for planned speaking events?
6. What are some of the things you worry about before, during and after a speaking event?
7. What are some ways you help to ease your stress/anxiety before giving a presentation?

ACTIVITY

Practice Impromptu Speaking

Ask for a few volunteers to respond in 1-2 minutes to one of the following questions. (Tip: have someone use the timer function on their phone to keep the speaker on time.)

1. Talk about a recent movie you saw and why did you like it or hate it?
2. If money were no object, where would you go for a two-month vacation and why?
3. Tell us about the last fun activity you did just for yourself? What did you like best?
4. Share an exotic recipe you tried cooking at home? How did it turn out?
5. Talk about a podcast you recently listened to. What was the main point of the episode?

NOTES