

# Adult Chapters

# **MEETING TOPICS**

## **OVERVIEW**

---

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.

There is no requirement for Chapter Leaders to use these guides. These are simply an option to consider if you need a topic for an upcoming meeting.

## **MEETING TOPICS**

---

- Disclosure: Advertising your Stutter ..... p. 2
- Self-Acceptance & Self-Advocacy ..... p. 4
- Portrayals of Stuttering in the Media and Popular Culture ..... p. 6
- Relationships and Dating ..... p. 8
- Surviving the Holidays ..... p. 9
- Overcoming Fears ..... p. 10





## 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?





## 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.)

The 18-minute video shows 13 examples of how PWS have been portrayed in the media from 1932 to present day. At points during the video you will be asked to pause the clip and encourage discussion with attendees. You can download or stream the following video link:

**VIDEO** | <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1T6dqjBYyO15CD6BHQQLQynebPyzli4Xk>

## EARLY FILMS & CARTOONS

**Scene #1** | **Freaks** (1932)

**Scene #2** | **Porky Pig** (1935, 1955)

**Scene #3** | **South Park** (early 2000s)

### CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What words come to mind from watching the Freaks clip?
- Despite both characters having a speech impediment, discuss how differently Daffy Duck is portrayed from Porky Pig.
- Does the "That's all Folks!" stuttering line bother you? If so, how?
- Is it more comfortable to laugh when it's a cartoon character who stutters?
- Does Jimmy's need for crutches further perpetuate the stereotype of a person who stutters?

## ENTERTAINERS & ATHLETES

Scene #4 | **Mel Tillis** (1972)

Scene #5 | **Drew Lynch** (2015)

Scene #6 | **George Springer** (2015)

### CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Does anything bother you about Glen Campbell in the Mel Tillis scene?
  - Does seeing a PWS tell jokes about stuttering make you comfortable or uncomfortable? Explain why or why not.
  - Discuss how Mel Tillis, Drew Lynch and George Springer positively, or negatively, represent the stuttering community.
- 

## BULLYING

Scene #7 | **M\*A\*S\*H** (1982)

### CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Has anyone ever had someone stand up for them when they stutter like Major Winchester does for Walt? If so, describe what happened,
  - Does your stutter ever make you feel that you are not as smart as everyone else around you? How did you overcome that perception?
- 

## WOMEN & STUTTERING

Scene #8 | **Glee** (2009)

Scene #9 | **Laughing to the Bank** (2011)

### CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Discuss how interesting, or not interesting, it is that the character in Glee uses a fake stutter to explain/conceal her shyness?
  - Talk about the emotions you felt watching the waitress who stutters and the reaction of the men in the scene to her stuttering.
  - A woman stuttering openly isn't seen much in popular culture. Why is that?
- 

## STUTTERING IN MOVIES

Scene #10 | **Rocket Science** (2007)

Scene #11 | **A Fish Called Wanda** (1988)

Scene #12 | **My Cousin Vinny** (1992)

Scene #13 | **The King's Speech** (2010)

### CONVERSATION STARTERS

- Who can relate to the scene from Rocket Science? How does it make you feel to relive that scene from your life?
- From A Fish Called Wanda and My Cousin Vinny, is one of these scenes more comfortable to laugh with? Explain why or why not.
- How does it make you feel knowing stuttering is being used solely for laughs in many movies?
- For those who have seen The King's Speech, talk about what it meant to you?
- What feelings did David Seidler's acceptance speech bring forth in you?



## 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?

In what ways have you seen fear rob your potential, or perhaps the potential of someone you know?

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?