



Comprehensive Treatment of Stuttering in Adults (90 min version)

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Outline

- **What is stuttering? (briefly)**
 - “Stuttering is more than just stuttering”
 - Why do adults still stutter?
- **Unique aspects of working with this population**
 - What brings adults to therapy?
 - What are the goals of therapy?
- **Treatment techniques**
 - Changing stuttering
 - Reducing shame and avoidance
 - Enhancing fluency
- **What else do you need to know? (lots!)**



Part 1: What Is Stuttering?

“Stuttering is more than just stuttering”

What Is Stuttering?

- On the surface, stuttering is a condition that affects the fluency of speech
 - Stuttering behavior typically involves the production of certain types of disruptions (“disfluencies”) in speech
- To the speaker, disruptions are experienced as a loss of control of the speech system
 - A moment when the speaker knows exactly what they want to say, but are unable to say it

What Is Stuttering?

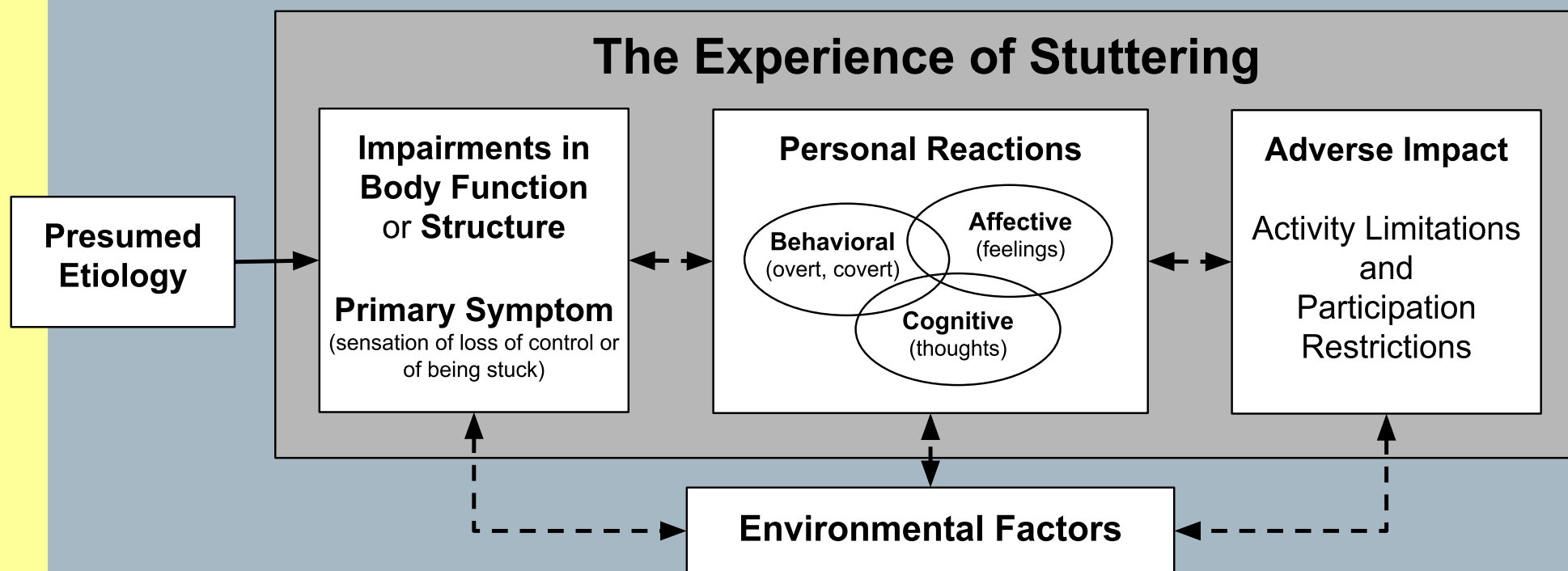
- Stuttering is also a condition that can affect all aspects of a person's life
- Any aspect of life that involves communication (and that's all of them) can be affected
 - Talking to other people
 - Giving presentations at work or in school
 - Ordering food at a restaurant
 - Talking on the phone
 - **EVERYTHING**

What Is Stuttering?

- *When people who stutter are asked what bothers them the most about stuttering, this is what they highlight:*
the way stuttering affects their lives

Stuttering Is More than Just Stuttering

- The World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) can be used to describe the full experience of conditions like stuttering



Tichenor & Yaruss (2019) Stuttering as Defined by People Who Stutter
Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research

Why Do Adults Still Stutter?

- Treatment for preschool children can be very effective in minimizing or eliminating stuttering
 - Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for school-age children, adolescents, and adults

Why Do Adults Still Stutter?

- As speech patterns become habituated (as neural pathways become hardwired), the chances that a person will *completely* recover from stuttering diminish.
- Observable stuttering *behaviors* may remain, though they may be reduced in frequency and modified in form
 - *This is one goal that we are seeking to accomplish through therapy!*

Setting Goals – Part I

- *For adults who stutter, we must be careful not to **limit** their success.*
 - True, there is no cure, and the speech behaviors may remain in some form
- Still, we must take a broader perspective about stuttering and not just focus on speech fluency

Setting Goals – Part I


- When we focus on *communication*, we can help people who stutter make gains in their ability to say what they want, when they want, to whom they want, and the way they want.
- *THIS is the true goal of therapy (regardless of the speaker's age and regardless of the type of disorder.)*



Part II:

Unique aspects of working with adults who stutter

People who stutter are affected
by more than just speech disfluencies



What brings adults to therapy?

People come to therapy
for a *reason*...

Why now?

- One of the first questions I ask is:
“why now?”
- Adults who stutter have typically been doing so for a long period of time
- Most have had treatment in the past – typically on more than one occasion, and with more than one clinician

Why now?


- Generally, they are seeking therapy at a given time *for a specific reason*
 - Starting to think about getting a job, going to college, joining the service, getting more serious in a relationship, etc.
 - They may also be trying to cope with negative experiences (embarrassment, bullying, etc.)
 - Some are are being forced into therapy by someone else (parent, teacher), and this may affect their motivation for therapy

Why now?

- Understanding what motivates a person to come to therapy ensures that you are addressing the goals that are relevant to that specific person at that specific time

Why now?

- Don't assume that all people are seeking improved fluency – sometimes, fluency is the least of their concerns.
 - Some want to feel better about themselves...
 - Some want to be able to talk more easily...
 - Some want to be able to talk on the phone, give a presentation, order at a restaurant, etc., *regardless of whether they stutter while doing it!*
 - Some do want to improve their speech fluency...



What are the goals of therapy?

Different people who stutter
have different goals...

Setting Goals – Part II

- By conducting a comprehensive evaluation (examining impairment, personal and environmental reactions, and negative impact), you can help clients determine their own individualized goals
- Although goals are individualized, there are some consistencies across different people who stutter

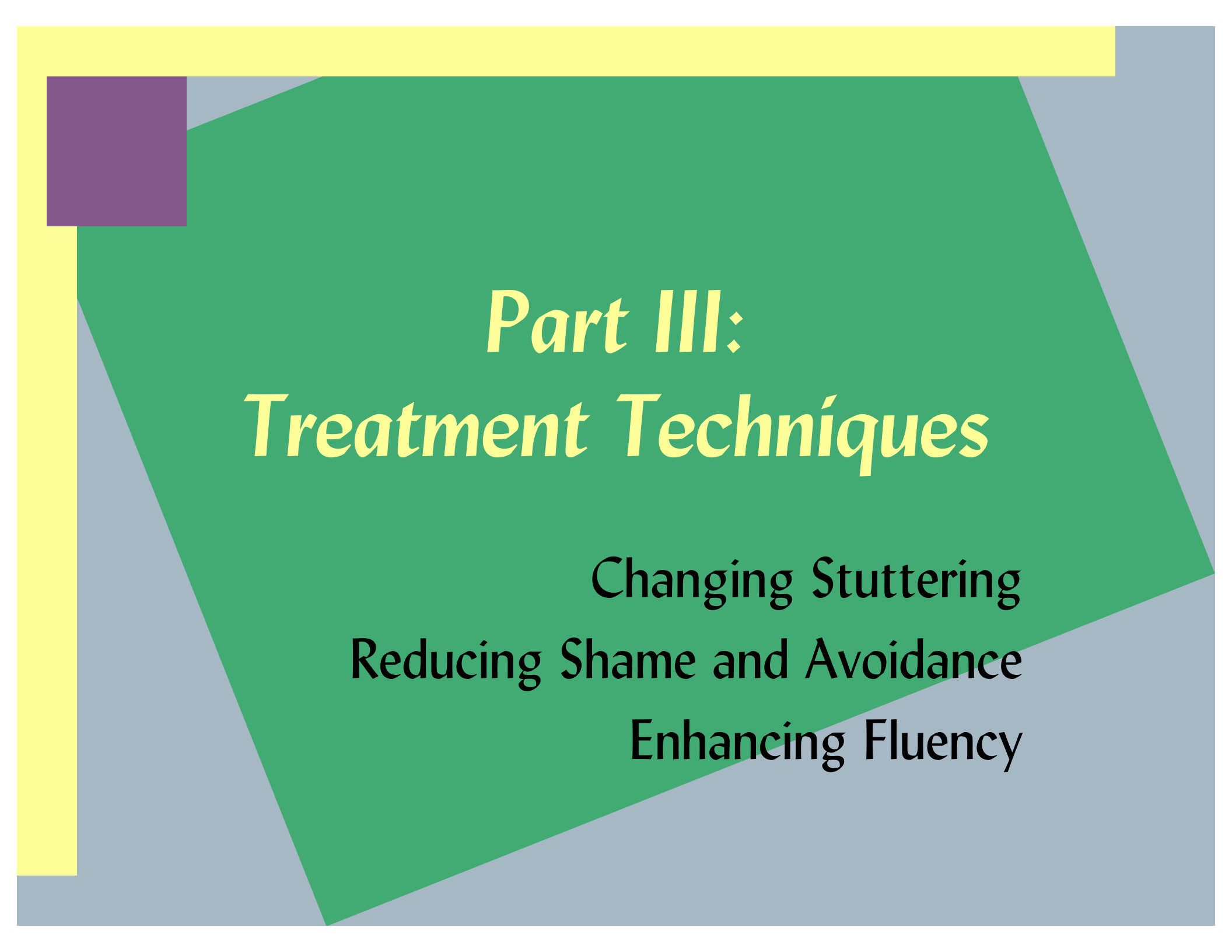
Setting Goals – Part II

- The remainder of this presentation will focus on key strategies for:

- *Changing Stuttering*

- *Reducing Shame and Avoidance*

- *Enhancing Fluency*



Part III: *Treatment Techniques*

Changing Stuttering
Reducing Shame and Avoidance
Enhancing Fluency

Changing Stuttering?

- Recognizing that there is no cure for stuttering, we must come to terms with the fact that our adult clients *will* continue to stutter (in some fashion).
 - Of course, we can definitely help them learn strategies that can reduce the frequency or severity of stuttering.
- *Still, some stuttering will remain*
 - *What form will that stuttering take?*

Changing Stuttering?

- Will stuttering be tense and disruptive to communication?
- *Can the speaker learn to stutter in a way that is less tense and less disruptive to communication?*

Step 1: Learning about Stuttering

- Before we can help speakers learn to change the way they stutter, we first have help them learn *what they do* when they stutter
 - Certainly, people who stutter are aware, at some level, of the various speech and nonspeech behaviors they exhibit during moments of stuttering
 - Many people have not considered these behaviors in detail, however, because they are embarrassing or uncomfortable to think about
- Step 1 in therapy is to help speakers learn more about stuttering.

There are Many Ways to Learn about Stuttering

- Read about stuttering and the experiences of others who stutter (popular press and self-help literature)
- Observe stuttering in other people (videos), clinicians (pseudostuttering), or themselves (mirror, video, exploration, pseudostuttering)
- Talk to other people who stutter (self-help groups – more on this later)

Some examples of what people “do” during stuttering

- Increase physical tension in their speech muscles
- Increase tension in muscles elsewhere in the body
- Hold their breath
- Expel all the air in their lungs
- Blink their eyes, turn their heads
- Move their arms or legs
- Tense up in anticipation of certain sounds or words
- Pretend to forget what they're saying
- Cough, clear their throat, look away to postpone speaking until they're ready
- Avoid talking altogether

Step 2:

Changing Stuttering

- As speakers understand more about what they do during stuttering, they can try to *change* what they're doing
 - Initially, this is difficult – these speech patterns have been built up over a long period of time
- Speakers can “hold on” to a moment of stuttering (“freeze”) then increase or *decrease* the tension in their muscles

In this way, they learn
that they can *stutter more easily*

Exercises that help speakers learn to “Stutter More Easily”

- Increasing then decreasing physical tension in various parts of the body, including the speech mechanism
- Pseudostuttering (fake stuttering) using a high degree of physical tension then a lower degree of physical tension
- Using “easy” pseudostuttering to reduce the build-up of physical tension that might lead to more tense stuttering



Reducing Shame and Avoidance

Stuttering is embarrassing,
but people can learn to accept it

Why do people avoid stuttering?

- Stuttering is *embarrassing*!
 - Stuttering sounds different, looks different, draws attention to itself, makes the person stand out...
 - People are often embarrassed by their speech disfluencies
 - This embarrassment can lead to shame: the feeling of being “defective” or “broken”

Avoidance

- In addition to tensing their muscles, people who stutter may try to HIDE their stuttering.
 - Changing their words carefully or using “circumlocution” to pick only the words they think they can say fluently
 - Avoiding sounds, syllables, situations, people
 - Pretending to be sick, distracted, confused...
 - Taking jobs that do not require talking, driving to a store rather than calling to see if a product is in, not asking for directions, etc.

Avoidance

Avoidance is a normal,
understandable reaction,
but it makes it harder
for people who stutter
to communicate effectively

Accepting Stuttering

- If people can learn to accept stuttering, they are less likely to try to hide it
- The problem is: *accepting stuttering is not easy*
 - You cannot simply tell the person “it’s okay to stutter” and expect them to believe it.
 - Adults already have a lifetime of belief systems and coping patterns built around stuttering
 - They must go through a process of learning to tolerate their stuttering – and learning to tolerate other people’s reactions to stuttering
- This process is called *desensitization*

Desensitization

- Desensitization is the process of *gradual* exposure to the things we are afraid of
 - People with a fear of spiders need to be gradually exposed to spiders to build up a resistance to fear
 - People with a fear of heights need to be gradually exposed to tall buildings
- You cannot just drop people into a stressful situation and expect them to sink or swim!
 - That's what adults have been doing all their lives – they need help in order to overcome their fear.

Steps toward Desensitization

- We help by gently guiding speakers toward experiences that *reduce* their fear

The only way to overcome fear of stuttering is by stuttering!

- Pseudostuttering (previously used for tension reduction) is also helpful for desensitization
 - By pseudostuttering openly, starting in safe situations, speakers can gradually learn to tolerate stuttering
 - As shame diminishes, they can move to more difficult real world situations and continue to reduce their fear



Enhancing Fluency

People *can* speak more fluently...
...but it takes a lot of work!

Enhancing Fluency

- Many techniques have been developed that help people speak more fluently
 - E.g., prolonged and other forms of slow speech, easy starts, light contact, pausing and phrasing, continuous phonation, pull-out, preparatory set, cancellation, etc.
- The sheer number of techniques is a source of confusion for people who stutter *and their SLPs*
 - How do you know you are using the best technique?

Enhancing Fluency

- We can simplify this by recognizing that all of these techniques are actually based on changing one of just TWO fundamental parameters of speech.

Two Parameters?

- All speech or stuttering modifications involve changes to *timing* or *tension*
 - Timing: prolonged (slow) speech, pausing & phrasing
 - Tension: light contact, easy start, pull-out, cancellation
- *Why timing and tension?*
 - These are aspects of speech that are disrupted during moments of stuttering
 - Techniques involve *replacing* disrupted timing and tension with *modified* timing and tension.

Techniques do not fix stuttering; they compensate for it!



*What else do we
need to know?*

...a lot

We are off a good start, but...

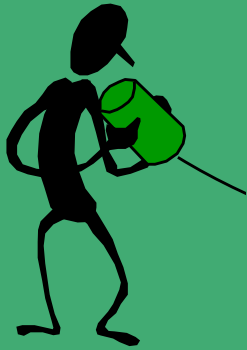
- We have covered techniques for changing stuttering, enhancing fluency, and minimizing avoidance and shame...
 - There is much that we have not covered
- The best thing that we can do as clinicians is learn from people who stutter
 - Listen to their stories, learn from their experiences, and adjust our understanding of stuttering accordingly

We are off a good start...

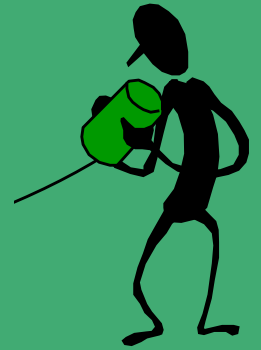
- Still, there is much we have not covered:
 - Using techniques while maximizing naturalness
 - Addressing responses of people in the environment (“people who stutter live in an environment that does not understand the disorder”)
 - Generalization activities that move success in the clinical setting to success in the real world
 - Helping the speaker face unique situations
 - Helping the speaker maintain over time

Self-Help and Support

- People who stutter learn from listening to each other, too!
 - Adults can benefit from participating in self-help and support groups
 - Support groups can help people come to terms with stuttering and enhance generalization of treatment gains
 - Support groups help people learn that they are not alone in facing stuttering



Questions? Comments? *Please contact me!*



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