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HANDOUT-ABLE: Summary of Stuttering Modification/Fluency-Enhancing Techniques

For patients who stutter, the more frequent strategies are practiced in different settings and contexts, the more benefit the speaker will tend to receive from the methods.

- Working with a speech-language pathologist on developing a hierarchy of situational concerns is a good way to start performing desensitization to reduce avoidance behaviors. All strategies should be utilized under the supervision and direction of a licensed and certified SLP.
- Talking about the experience of stuttering with an SLP can aid in being reassured that feelings surrounding stuttering are typical, expected, and can be challenging.
- Finding a way to embrace stuttering behaviors as only one aspect of a speaker's communication — there are many part of how a speaker communicates — that can be a strength. Focusing on the other aspects of communication can build confidence.

Tools for addressing stuttering and fluency can be divided in two general categories: **Stuttering modification strategies**, and **Fluency-enhancing techniques**.

Speech pathologists tend to choose both types of approaches to benefit patients as a hybrid, or combination approach. The purpose of this resource is to describe in one document -- common strategies and techniques that are introduced and practiced in speech pathology treatment visits.

Stuttering modification strategies — the ultimate goal and benefit is to speak with less tension -- due to new added manner of speech productions, reducing disfluencies, increase awareness of stuttering moments and treat secondary behaviors that result from stuttering. The focus: change the way speakers stutter. These techniques target the speaker's tension, struggle and avoidance of the core moment of stuttering. As a result, a reduction and management of fear/avoidance occurs through desensitization.

Purposes of Stuttering modification strategies:

- To increase awareness of physical tension
- Reduce physical tension
- Reduce struggling behaviors/unlearn secondary behaviors
- Reduce negative reactions of the speaker
- Increase feelings of self-control
- Increase awareness of speech that is disfluent
- Approach in stuttering in a relaxed approach
- Reduce feelings of sensitive about disfluencies
- Increase feelings of openness and acceptance
- Reduced negative reactions to stuttering

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Types of stuttering modification strategies:

- “Sliding or Pull-outs” = this is a strategy that involves the stretching of the during actual stuttering moment. This technique provides control of stutters which occur, and it is a stretching motion to relax the stutter in “real time” moments of communication. Reducing tension is a benefit -- and allowing speech to keep flowing as well is a good outcome of this strategy. First, the speaker needs to identify that a stuttering moment is occurring, then, before moving forward — holding the tension steady. Then, slowly and smoothly stretching out the transition between sounds in going ahead and completing the word. This strategy is similar to “relaxing the stutter”; however, there are no repetitions.
- “Relaxing the Stutter” = A strategy for only therapy sessions — this is a strategy where purposeful stutters occur (speakers try to stutter in a way they typically would). Then, speakers are instructed to repeat the same word with a reduction in sensation up to 50%. An extra activity is to perform another intentional stutter with even less tension, like 25% of the original intentional stuttered word. Awareness of how these stuttering behaviors are observed is focused on. Questions from the ST involve the location of the tension physically during the stuttering moment, what type of stuttering behavior was produced, and asking for a description of how the stuttering moment felt to the speaker.
- “Catching the stutter” = This is a strategy to only use in therapy sessions with a speech pathologist. “Catching the stutter” involves participating in activities that promote awareness of the occurrence of stuttering behaviors, during speech therapy sessions. For example, in therapy activities, catching the stutter involves physical responses indicator to identity awareness of stuttering movements’ occurrence — such as raising a hand or fingers. Other movements could be using a physical prompt such as a sign to raise with the physical intensity that matches the perceived intensity of the speaker’s stuttering behavior. Until the speaker can achieve full understanding/awareness of the occurrences of stuttering, using other strategies in the event a stutter will tend to not be effective, as the first step is being able to identify the occurrence of all stuttering behaviors.
- “Intentional stuttering” = a preparatory activity to reduce anxiety and stigma of the stuttering behavior. Speakers intentionally perform disfluency behaviors. It also reduces the negative feelings speakers experience during stuttering.

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- “Easy stuttering/also called Fluent stuttering” = this is a technique that speakers with disfluencies can utilize in different capacities — the strategy is for changing how words can be produced — using an easy manner compared to how usually a disfluency would be produced. This strategy can be used in anticipation of a future stuttered word. Easy manner is produced on a non-disfluent word prior to the word that the speaker anticipates they will stutter on. Producing words in this manner will allow the movement of the word to be smoother and release tension. It will also allow for there not to be as much of an interruption to the follow of conversation. It can also be used in the middle of a stutter. Another aspect is using “Easy Speech” randomly during conversational tasks to communicate to listeners that there is stuttering present, and that it is not a factor to hide from. This allows the speaker to release tension and avoid the struggle that may come. Practice of this should occur in the therapy treatment room with a speech pathologist.
- Bouncing = this stuttering modification technique involves producing sounds or words in an easier capacity that previously in the speaker’s history — this results in improving awareness of tension that can be present or absent in speech productions. It also improves the comfortableness of the speaker of stuttering itself, thereby helping the speaker feel more comfortable when stuttering moments occur.
- Cancellation = this is a strategy where the word is produced again after a stutter, but with less tension physically, and slower and controlled. This “re-do” allows the speaker to attempt to work on improving the flow of communication, thereby reducing stuttering behaviors.
- Preparatory set = this is a strategy that can be used prior to the production of an upcoming word that the speaker anticipates or feels it is likely the target word will be stuttered. Using a slower rate and light articulatory contacts allows the speaker who experiences stuttering to begin the first sound of the word slowly, smoothly, and easily.

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Fluency-enhancing techniques — these strategies are for encouraging fluency in a general capacity. The focus is fluency, not “surviving/tolerating/modifying a stutter” like in stuttering modification strategies.

Purposes:

- Obtain fluent speech outside of stuttering behaviors, or before stuttering events.
- The aim to prevent the intensity or frequency of stuttering behavior.
- Allow for success in achieving fluency so to increase confidence.
- To decrease negative reactions to stuttering — so to promote fluent speech.
- Alter speakers’ articulation, speech rate, breath patterns, voice productions and other aspects of communication to reduce vulnerabilities to disfluencies.
- These are strategies to utilize when communicating in a general capacity, not just in the targeted moments of stuttering. Using these strategies will allow for the best chance at a communication environment that will be more fluent, thereby reducing the occurrence of the need to utilize stuttering modification strategies.

Fluency-enhancing techniques are attempts at promoting fluency in a generalized way:

- Light contact = producing the initial sounds of words that are plosives in manner — /b, p, d, t, g, k/ — these sounds are produced very gently. Light productions improve fluency due to less tension being involved.
- Slower speech rates = slowing down the rate of speech may improve fluency.
- Relaxed breath patterns = reducing tension globally via focusing on reducing tension in breath patterns can also improve fluency. Understanding, identifying and producing deep breaths vs. shallow breaths vs. full breaths and coordinating air flow will increase awareness of how respirations play a role in fluency.
- Slow/stretched speech = Prolonged productions of speech sounds in a general capacity improve fluency on a global level.
- Easy onset = producing initial sounds of words like vowels, fricatives /z, s, v, v/ nasals /n, m/ and liquid /l/ also in an easy and gentle way.
- Pausing and chunking = This technique involves creating natural breaths, allowing for pausing that is indicated for improving fluency. Also, how information is communicated is grouped can play a role in where these natural breaks can occur.