

Best Practices: Workshop Suggestions

Here's the list of suggested "Best Practices," as suggested by the group. I've elaborated a bit on several of them but kept the core suggestion intact. Again, please remember my disclaimers: 1) I'm not an SLP; 2) Always put the advice and guidance of your SLP first; and 3) not all suggestions will necessarily work for everyone.

1. **Use A "Grounding" Technique:** When the going gets tough, some who stutter may use a certain technique or "grounding" mechanism that brings them to the fundamentals of speech that work for them. The technique used by the person who suggested this at the workshop is to "let the tongue feel the words on the teeth...a physical but conscious thing." Different stutterers may have different "go to" practices that work for them, such as speaking more slowly, sounding out syllables or practicing deep, diaphragmatic breathing. Whatever works for you, do it! When experiencing blockages or just enduring a tough speaking episode, it's easy to forget what we know about our speech patterns and what works best for us. One solid "go to" routine can help keep all this in focus and may bring us back to a steadier platform.
2. **Speak More Slowly, Syllable By Syllable:** First, see #1 above. But beyond that, the participant here was suggesting this as a normal course that works for them. Not for me to say. But for a lot of stutterers I've met, speaking a bit more slowly sure helps. Or, to express the obverse of this, many stutterers I've met often speak quickly and in short bursts. So if it helps, slow down and parse those words out into syllables. Practice this using the attached Fluency Shaping Practice List.
3. **The Message Is Important:** Hear, hear!!....Those who stutter all too often forget this. Your job in speaking, in linking words together into sentences, is to communicate with other human beings. It's the message that's key, not the way we say it. By remembering this, we put less pressure on ourselves to be perfect or notable speakers. Focus on what you're saying. Say exactly what you want to say and what needs to be said, and in the words you want to use. Focus on the message and the content, and the vehicle will take care of itself.
4. **Relax and Connect The Body:** That was the suggestion. Just as written in the heading. And how true it is. Many stutterers are rigid with tension, anxiety and effort when they speak. Easy to say, but by relaxing the body, particularly the thorax, throat and diaphragm, is a key step in easing those words out rather than forcing them. Deep breathing always helps with this. I remember the many diaphragmatic exercises we did

way back in 1977 when I took my brief fluency shaping course. When you breathe deeply, you can feel the tension and tightness subsiding. Practice it. Mindfulness exercises and simple meditation routines can also be useful when we're not speaking.

5. **Turn The Voice Into An Instrument:** The suggestion here is to remember that most people who stutter don't do so when they sing, so if you emulate the practice of singing while talking, some may stutter less or not at all. I don't think the suggestion here is that we necessarily sing our words rather than say them, but that we try to replicate mentally the zone we enter when we sing. As well, if we bring a nice lilt to our words, if we in a sense speak them rhythmically and with a musical cadence, we may find that they come to our lips more easily. I think this links nicely with my suggestion about reading out loud, getting animated and practice with poems and dramatic pieces. So much of increased fluency is linked to breathing. Anything that leads to deep, relaxed inhalations is paramount.
6. **Use Hand Gestures/Body Movements:** See the last point + my Ten Pathways list. Geoff Reagan, our keynote speaker, also referenced this. He said that at one point, even though his fluency was improving, he realized that he was quite wooden and static when he spoke. By adopting more hand gestures and movement, it helped him become more animated and emphatic in what he was saying, with attendant positive results on fluency. No doubt, it also made him a better communicator. Remember, A/V feedback research underscores that most speakers are shocked to see how deadly one-dimensional they are in their delivery. As often as possible and appropriate, speak with emphasis and conviction. This forces deeper breathing and results in more modulated speech patterns, both of which may lead to improved fluency.
7. **Stutter On Purpose:** This may be a rather controversial practice, but it's quite widely used by both those who stutter and by therapists. This was a key part of my Desensitization Therapy way back in 1972. At that time, we used intentional stuttering to learn how to objectify and control blockages, the theory being that if one can bring a blockage on intentionally, one can also learn how to intervene and terminate it. It worked for me. Stuttering intentionally may bring us back to the basics of our speech patterns and the basics of the interventions and therapies that work best for us.
8. **Groups and The Buddy System:** There were separate workshops that dealt with this, but certainly having a fellow person or two who stutters to help you along the way can sure be of great help. The advice, counsel and support can be of immeasurable assistance. I can honestly say that my march toward improved fluency did not start until I began to dialogue with other people who stutter as part of my first therapy at age 22. We learn both from and through others. It has ever been thus.

9. **Practice Yoga/Deep Breathing:** This is a theme throughout. Again, deep diaphragmatic breathing is key to relaxation of the thorax and “speaking machinery” and is therefore paramount to improved fluency. So anything we can do to learn more about breathing better is most useful and should be observed.