

Interprofessional Education: Stuttering Therapy Meets Sport Psychology

The Center for Stuttering Therapy at Boston University

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Why Sport Psychology?

Sport Psychology is intended to enhance the performance of athletes from a psychological viewpoint. People who stutter might be considered “vocal athletes” who would benefit from strategies used by athletes when they want to modify their speech in challenging situations such as public speaking or interviewing. **Performance Anxiety:** an emotional state of apprehension in response to stress placed on an individual to perform optimally.

Parallels to Stuttering

Event → Thoughts → Symptoms → Behavior

Sport Event shooting a free throw shot

Thoughts

I can't/won't make the shot

Behavior

“Freezing up,” not shooting the way practiced, ball slips

Symptoms

Increased HR, arms begin to shake, palms sweat, lose focus

Speaking Event job interview

Thoughts

I won't get the job if I stutter

Behavior

Forgetting answers prepared or speech strategies learned

Symptoms

Increased HR, fast/shallow breaths, tense muscles, lack of focus



The Strategies



Before

Strategy: 4-7-8 Breathing

How to: Relax your body and mind by inhaling through your nose for a count of 4, hold your breath at the peak of inhalation for 7, and exhale through your mouth for 8. Repeat for four breath cycles.
4X/day 8 weeks (Dr. Weil)

Strategy: Visualization

How to: Visualize yourself speaking effectively; make a “highlight video” and watch it before the event. Frequency of stuttering reduced when speakers repeatedly watched self producing fluent speech (Bray & Kehle).

During

Strategy:

W.I.N = What's Important Now

How to: Practice identifying what is most important to focus on in various anxiety-inducing situations; then, use that as “go to” during those moments to get your mind back on track.

Strategy:

Use your “Go-To's”

How to: Use the 2-3 strategies that are most helpful in reducing your performance anxiety, e.g. positive self-talk, focus on your “why” /purpose, feel the movements of your speech muscles, etc.

After

Strategy:

3-2-1 Growth Mindset

How to: After an anxiety-provoking event, write down the following:

3 things you did well

2 things you could improve on

1 take away from the experience

Strategy:

Debrief with “Go-To” person

How to: Discuss your 3-2-1 with someone you trust and who will provide honest feedback. The people who listen without judgment and help you cope positively.

Case Example

Client: 13 y/o boy **Event:** Class Presentation

Before:

Say: “I don't know these people so it doesn't really matter what they say”
Relax by: 4-7-8 breathing
Go-to People: Friends, teachers

During:

Say: “I'm almost done” “I got this!”
Relax by: remember W.I.N, Communicating what I have to say
Go-to People: friends among classmates

After:

Say: “That wasn't as hard as I thought it would be!”
Relax by: 3-2-1 Growth Mindset
Go-to People: Parents

Future Directions

(1) Develop a **measure for evaluating performance anxiety** in individuals who stutter to collect baseline data and measure progress.

(2) Conduct a **Pilot study** on usefulness of sport psychology strategies for people who stutter in comparison to traditional CBT techniques.

Key References

- Bray, M. A. & Kehle, T. J. (1998) Self-modeling as an intervention to stuttering. *School Psychology Review*. 27(4). 587-598
- Cox, R. (1998). *Sport psychology*. London: McGraw-Hill Pub. (ISE Editions).
- Dweck, C. S. (2017). *Mindset*. London: Robinson, an imprint of Little, Brown Book Group.
- Video: Dr. Weil's Breathing Exercises: 4-7-8 Breath. (2017, September 20). <https://www.drweil.com/videos-features/videos/breathing-exercises-4-7-8-breath/>