



THE  
STUTTERING  
FOUNDATION®

A Nonprofit Organization  
Since 1947 – Helping Those Who Stutter

# USING THE PHONE

## A GUIDE FOR PEOPLE WHO STUTTER

### PREPARATION

1. Make sure you know why you are calling. Write the key points on paper and have it in front of you when you call.
2. Try phoning a friend or relative just before the big call. This may help relax you.
3. If you have a number of calls to make, list them in ascending order. Start with the easiest and work your way up to the most difficult.
4. Do not keep putting off the call you need to make. That will make it even more stressful and difficult.

### THE CALL

Quite often the difficult part is getting through to the right person. If you are confronted by a receptionist, for example, would an extension number or department be easier to say than someone's name? Have some alternative first words in mind; be flexible in what you want to say. If you do start to block, stutter openly and gently; try not to force the words out and remember to speak slowly.

Do not worry too much about silences; they occur in all conversations. Concentrate on what you have to say, rather than worry about any blocks. Your purpose is to communicate, whether you stutter or not. Pay attention to your fluent speech. Many stutters forget about their times of fluency and dwell on the stuttering. Savor your fluency; make other calls when feeling more fluent; strike while the iron is hot. Fluent speech breeds confidence, and confidence breeds fluent speech.

Watching yourself in a mirror while phoning can be helpful as you will be able to see where the tension lies in your face and other parts of your body. If you persevered with a difficult call and felt you communicated well, then praise or treat yourself and remember the good feeling that a successful call gave you.



Many people—whether they stutter or not—have difficulty using the telephone. Listen to some non-stutterers deal with a phone call. Some take several seconds to answer. Others may “Um” and “Ah” a lot. Others may be very expressive with their hands or faces, perhaps talking loudly and aggressively.

Using the phone can cause a great deal of anguish, and each person must learn to cope with it in his or her own way.

If, as a person who stutters, you have a problem using the telephone, then you may find the advice here to be helpful.

Making a call can usually be split into three phases: preparation, the call, and assessing how you did.

## GENERAL ADVICE

- Practice should help you to feel happier about using the telephone.
- Confront your fear of the telephone. Talk about what it is that you fear happening and what you can do about it.
- Try to be aware of situations where you avoid using the telephone and gradually tackle these calls. Make the most of local calls for practice. Choose to use the telephone rather than write letters.
- Try to be the person in your household who answers the telephone.
  - Openly admit that you stutter. This may be very difficult if you have avoided talking about it all your life. Practice talking about your stuttering. Many people have said that talking about it has reduced their anxiety and fear.
- Watch and listen to non-stutterers using the telephone. Listen to their lack of fluency and their hesitation.
- Give others the benefit of the doubt. If they know you stutter then they are prepared to expect some silences.
- Finally practice, practice, practice. It is far better to use the telephone and stutter than to avoid using the telephone.

## ASSESSING HOW YOU DID

Most people, not just those who stutter, sometimes make calls when they feel they have been less than fluent or have not managed to get their message across.

If you felt that a particular call was stressful and you stuttered more than usual, try to forget it. Adopt a positive attitude; remember there will be other conversations when you will stutter less. It is not a disaster to stutter, and you can learn from each speaking experience. At home, record your telephone conversations if you can. Note your speech carefully, especially the speed and the lead up to any blocks. Try to learn from each recording, and prepare a strategy for the next call. Doing this over a period of time will help to identify certain recurring problems and words.

## RECEIVING CALLS

This is the area over which you have least control. However, even here you can go part way to easing some of the pressure you may feel.

Answer the call in your own time. Don't rush to the phone.

Again have key word options ready: your extension number, name of your organization, or even just your name. Use whatever comes easiest to you at that moment.

If you receive a call within earshot of other people, concentrate solely on that call. Accept that others may hear and see you block, but do not allow their presence to distract you from your phone call.

Don't be afraid of initial silence on the phone if you struggle for your first word. It is quite common for someone to answer the phone and then not speak, either because they're finishing a conversation with a colleague or because they have picked up someone else's phone and are waiting for them to return to their seat.

The person phoning you may also stutter. Be patient with others who may be just as anxious as you and may be putting into practice some of the above points.