Practical Tip:

**Telepractice and Stuttering Therapy**

Part 2: Getting Specific

You’ve made the decision to start doing telepractice with your clients who stutter. Or, someone else (or life situations) have made the decision for you. Either way, it’s time to start applying the general skills that you’ve learned about telepractice to the specific work of helping people who stutter.

At Stuttering Therapy Resources, we truly believe that telepractice can bring advantages to our clients. True, there are some things that are simply harder to do when you can meet with your clients in-person. Still, there is much that we can accomplish, and our goal is to help you focus on the positives and overcome the limitations. Here are some thoughts to help you and your clients achieve your goals:

**Remember the fundamentals**

No matter what service-delivery model you use, you will always want to remember these fundamental truths about stuttering and stuttering therapy:

- **It is okay to stutter!** You can tell your clients this in person, online, via (secure) email, on the phone, in handouts, and using smoke signals. Keep on telling them this via every communication channel available to you. You set the tone in therapy through what you say and what you do (and what you don’t do). This is particularly true when it comes to accepting stuttering. Model acceptance in every interaction with your clients, and this will help them come to accept stuttering, as well.

- **Stuttering is more than just stuttering!** When planning your therapy, remember that you want to address the entirety of stuttering. Don’t feel that just because you’re in an online format that you have focus just on speech fluency. You can—and should—use telepractice to address your client’s feelings and other reactions to stuttering, the difficulties that the speaker may have in real-world situations, the impact of stuttering on your client’s life, and more…just as you would in face-to-face therapy.

- **Stuttering varies.** One of the most frustrating aspects of stuttering for people who stutter is the fact that stuttering varies. People stutter differently in different situations—and the telepractice situation may be different for them than an in-person situation. Don’t be surprised if you see different patterns of stuttering in your clients when they are online compared to in-person. Help them understand what they are experiencing, and this will help to reduce their uncertainty and their frustration.

- **Changing stuttering, speech production, and thought patterns takes practice and hard work.** Every change that we ask our clients to make, whether it be in the way they handle moments of stuttering or in the way that they think about themselves and their speech, takes practice. A lot of it. You can help your clients with that practice even if you are not face-to-face with them.

All of these facts (and many more) are true when you see your clients in person, and they are true when you see your clients electronically. Try to remember the fundamentals, and this will help you and your students feel less “out of your element” when you shift to telepractice.

**What can’t I do via telepractice?**

Much of what you do in person can also be done online, but not everything. Unfortunately, there is one very important component of stuttering therapy that is just plain harder to do via telepractice: field trips. We often go out into the “real world” with our clients in therapy to help them practice their new skills in other settings. This is an essential part of the process of helping clients generalize their skills out of the therapy room. If we’re only meeting online, however, then we can’t meet them at the mall or grocery store or pet store or park. Generalization practice is still necessary, though, so we need to draw upon other tools to help your clients shift their skills from the clinic to the real world.
When we are engaged in telepractice, we take several steps to help our clients generalize their skills:

• First, we talk with them about the fact that the telepractice model requires that they will have to take more responsibility for generalizing their skills on their own. We explain that in face-to-face therapy, we would go with them to new settings and situations to help them practice, but if we can’t work with them in person (due to distance or other barriers), they will have to do this themselves. Help your clients know that you will help to prepare them to take these important steps, but prepare them—starting right at the beginning of therapy—to take responsibility for their own practice. This applies not only to speech handling strategies but also to aspects of therapy for reducing negative reactions to stuttering (e.g., desensitization).

• Second, we help clients learn the value of hierarchies for moving from easier to harder situations as they expand their skills. Of course, we use hierarchies in therapy regardless of the service delivery model. The difference with telepractice is that our clients need to learn more about how they can create their own hierarchies to ensure their progress. Again, this is true for speech strategies and acceptance work.

• Third, we instill in clients a sense of confidence that they can make progress on their own. We never want clients to become entirely dependent upon us for their reinforcement, but with telepractice, this is particularly important. Help your clients learn to recognize and reward their own accomplishments, so that they can propel themselves forward along their own hierarchies and recognize their achievements along the way. Encourage your clients to give themselves a pat on the back when they try a new skill—or when they allow themselves to speak more freely even when they are afraid that they might stutter.

• Fourth, we focus heavily on developing our clients’ problem-solving skills. Again, this is a fundamental aspect of all therapy, but it is particularly important when we are engaged in telepractice. We won’t always be able to sit directly with our clients to work through the challenges they face. We might not be able to offer a reassuring example or hand them a tissue when they are struggling. As they enhance their problem-solving skills, however, they will be better able to face new situations, figure out different ways of achieving their goals, and expand their success independently.

• Relatedly, we put extra emphasis on fostering creativity in our clients, so they will learn that there is always another way to face a problem. Often, we are there to provide that novel perspective for them; when we’re not there, then they can use and expand their own skills for thinking outside the box.

• Finally, we make an extra effort to ensure that our clients understand their goals. We always want clients to understand what we are trying to accomplish in therapy, but if they are going to be relying more on themselves to plan their practice and track their progress, then they need to know where they’re headed.

**Remember that YOU CAN DO IT!**

There is much more that we can say about how to conduct stuttering therapy via telepractice. The key point to remember as you start is that you can adapt just about any aspect of therapy to online administration. Sometimes, it will take a bit of creativity, but we know that you can do it.

**Also, remember that it gets easier**

Just like with face-to-face therapy, you will learn new ways of enhancing your telepractice service delivery. You’ll get better at using your platform; you’ll get quicker at sharing your screen; you’ll discover new online resources (such as our Practical Videos showing various speech handling strategies); and, you’ll develop your own online style to keep your clients engaged.

Of course, we’ll be here to help, as well. Stuttering Therapy Resources will be posting more information to help you help people who stutter, so be sure to follow us on all of our social media channels and check our website often: https://www.StutteringTherapyResources.com.