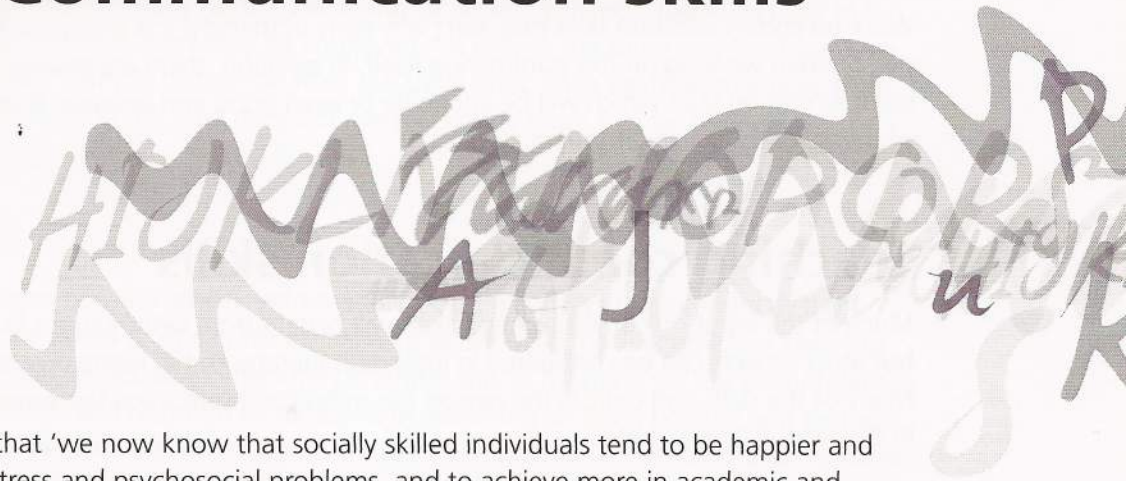


2 | Communication skills



Hargie points out that 'we now know that socially skilled individuals tend to be happier and more resistant to stress and psychosocial problems, and to achieve more in academic and professional contexts' (2006, p563). Stammering is not just a speech problem; it is a problem of communication. There are a number of reasons why a person who stammers may lack competence in his communication skills.

- Because of avoidance, he is less practised in communicating the things he wants to say. He may stick to situations he is sure of, in which he feels safe and about which he can make predictions.
- Because of his attitudes to speaking, a person who stammers often feels inadequate or unworthy as a communicator. He can thus appear unassertive, uninterested and/or uninteresting.
- Because of fear of stammering, a person who stammers may choose to be a 'responder' rather than an 'instigator'; he may even pretend to adhere to the same views as others because then his fluency is less likely to be disrupted.
- Fear of stammering can make a person focus on his own role in a speaking situation, thus neglecting the listener. Hence both his listening and observation skills may be impaired and the listener's feelings and thoughts are not adequately considered.
- Content is sometimes compromised because fluency is seen as the most important part of the communication.
- Over-focusing on speech and fluency can mean that non-verbal skills are ignored.

Fransella points out that:

the stutterer knows all about playing the 'stutterer role' ... he knows the variety of ways in which a person will react to his speaking, and he knows what his reactions will be to the listener's reactions. But he is inexperienced at interpreting the subtler forms of communication such as eye contact, hand gestures and general body movements, which are normal reactions to the fluent person. His focus of attention is mainly on himself, and on the degree of difficulty he is having in getting out the words he wants, and is busy interpreting the reactions of the listener, which on most occasions are reactions to him as a stutterer. When he speaks he construes himself as a stutterer. (1972, p58).

When to use

Work on communication skills may start very early in therapy. It is often less threatening for the person than working on the stammering itself. In addition, there are usually areas of a person's communication skills which will be adequate or even good and pointing these out at the start of therapy can be very affirming.

Teaching communication skills

Much of the input on communication skills will benefit from being taught in a group context, but most aspects can be considered in individual therapy and in home practice exercises. Many of the skills and deficits the person has in his communication will have been noted in the identification phase.

In this chapter we will explore three areas of communication skills: non-verbal communication (eye contact, facial expression, gesture and posture), listening and conversation skills.

Non-verbal communication

Eye contact

We will discuss later the difficulty a person may have in maintaining eye contact when he stammers (see Chapter 7 'Desensitisation'). Some people may find it difficult to look at others even when they are fluent; others may, in addition, have problems with eye contact when they are listeners. It is generally felt that the more eye contact a person uses, the more others see them as friendly. However, a person who stares at others is likely to be perceived more negatively, maybe as hostile or over-confident. Finding a happy medium can take practice. As well as helping a client develop his own eye contact, it is important to make him aware that however much he improves, some listeners will continue to look away in response, either because they find it hard to tolerate stammering or because they themselves have poor eye contact.

Facial expression

A person who stammers may show little facial expression. Perhaps this is because he is preoccupied with what he is saying or concerned with planning ahead. The aim of work in this area is to help a client to understand that by increasing his use and range of expressions, he can reinforce the meaning of what he is saying and also take his listener's focus away from fluency. It is also important that a client is aware of the links between facial expression and other non-verbal skills. For example, smiling while tapping one's foot might not convey the contentment that smiling alone would.

Gesture

Research indicates that non-verbal signals deliver five times more impact than verbal ones. If the two are not congruent, it is the non-verbal one which is most readily accepted. Gesture can be used for several purposes: instead of speech (a nod or a shrug), to enhance speech (for example, an indication of size made with the hands), an emotion (hands held up to indicate desperation, tapping one's hand to indicate boredom). For a person who stammers,

gestures may also be used because use of speech alone is felt to be a problem. Someone who stammers may in addition employ gestures as a way of avoiding speech. Gestures used to enhance speech in fluent speakers may be employed not only in the same way by those who stammer, but also as a form of distraction from the dysfluency. Thus we have to ensure that any input clinicians make in this area does not merely provide more fuel for hiding or avoiding stammering.

Posture

While facial expression conveys specific information, posture conveys the intensity of the emotion. The way we stand or sit can tell others a lot about us. If, for example, we keep our head down or stand in a rigid way, others may interpret this as meaning we are unconfident or tense. We show we are well disposed to someone by assuming an open posture and perhaps by leaning forward. We can also demonstrate status by our posture; if we stand over someone we are more likely to feel in control of the situation than if we are being towered over by someone else. It is important to help a client assume postures which complement what he is aiming to communicate, rather than those which detract from or add nothing to his communication.

Activities for non-verbal communication

Group therapy is the desired forum for communication skills work. A client has the opportunity to practise skills in a situation that is closer to real life, to be given feedback from several people and to learn from others' perspectives. Most aspects can, however, be practised individually with some modification, although a client may not gain as much from one-to-one practice as he would from a group.

General activities for non-verbal communication skills

Note that **I** is used to indicate suitability for individual therapy and **G** for group therapy.

Discussion **I** **G**

The group discusses why is it important for a person who stammers to work on non-verbal skills. The following points should emerge, but if not the clinician should raise them.

- Feeling more competent as a communicator will increase confidence in speaking.
- Acting as if one is confident can bring about responses in others, which in turn increase actual confidence.
- Concentrating on other skills takes the emphasis off the stammer, for both the speaker and the listener.
- If the person communicates well he is more likely to hold the listener's interest.
- The person is likely to enjoy speaking more if he feels he performs well.

It may be useful to give clients a handout on non-verbal behaviour (see Handout 1).

Silent communication ⚙️

This activity can help to demonstrate how much information can be delivered without the need for words. In pairs or in a group, participants take it in turns to communicate something to their partner or the rest of the group. It is the ideas and not any specific words that must be guessed. The observers have to guess what the message is as quickly as they can. The person whose mime has been guessed most quickly is the winner. Examples of subjects to communicate might be:

- I am sad because my dog has died
- I am feeling ill
- My mother has gone on holiday
- The weather is fantastic
- House prices are rising
- My friend has won the lottery
- I am late for the cinema.

Home-based activity 1

The client watches people he comes across in his everyday life, as well as people in the media, and returns to therapy with lists of good and bad communication skills.

Home-based activity 2

The client evaluates himself as a communicator, listing those things he feels he is good and not so good at. He can supplement his own observations by asking the views of friends and other group members if appropriate and by analysing his own performance on video.

Activities for specific non-verbal communication skills

Once a client has a good understanding of desired skills, he can look at those he feels are particularly relevant for him to practise. It should be pointed out to a client that many people who do not stammer have poor communication skills for a variety of reasons. They may, for example, be lacking in confidence, uncertain of what they are saying, inexperienced in talking in many situations or come from a background where communication is not considered an important skill.

It is important to be sensitive to the differences in non-verbal behaviours between cultures. Some cultures, for example, see it as unacceptable to look someone in the face, while in others the 'personal space' required by individuals is considerably less than might be acceptable, for example, in the UK.

Activities for eye contact

Discussion ⓘ ⚙️

What constitutes good eye contact? Using information gleaned from observation exercises in the previous section, ideas to consider could include the following:

- There is a difference between appropriate eye contact and staring.

- The amount of eye contact can have different implications: for example, more eye contact can represent both intimacy and supremacy, depending on the context.
- An averted gaze can indicate fear, untrustworthiness, boredom, lack of confidence, or that the person is thinking.
- The most helpful pattern is of frequent eye contact interspersed with looking away. The ratio of the glances will vary considerably according to the situation: for example, on a train the glances are likely to be infrequent and momentary, with a close friend the eye contact will be more frequent and maintained for longer.

Role play ⓘ ⚙️

With the clinician or with other group members, a client or group of clients is given situations to role play. Other group members and/or the clinician observe and give feedback on the appropriateness of the amount of eye contact given for the specific situation. If it is a group situation, comments can also be made about the distribution of the eye contact among the listeners. Situations might include:

- talking to a close friend or family member
- attracting someone's attention
- asking for a ticket
- making a complaint
- at a bar in a nightclub
- an interview
- giving a presentation
- introducing two people
- asking for directions
- at a supermarket checkout.

Discussion ⓘ ⚙️

Handout 2 'Increasing eye contact when stammering' is used as a basis for discussion.

Monologue ⓘ ⚙️

The client is asked to talk about his job, a holiday or a hobby (something fairly unemotive). The aim is for him to initiate eye contact just before he begins to speak. This helps him to establish his speaking turn and then to maintain eye contact once speaking begins.

Speaking circles ⚙️

This activity, described fully in Chapter 7 'Desensitisation', is a powerful exercise which aims to help people feel at ease when using eye contact in a group.

Home-based activity

This exercise is for a client who has difficulty in maintaining eye contact as a listener. He is asked to notice specific things about another person's face. To make this activity more interesting you could use the 'People's bingo' sheet we have included as Handout 3, or make one up specific to your client's needs.

Activities for facial expression

Expressing emotions facially ⓘ ⚙

Sentences are written on cards placed face down in a pile. A client chooses an emotion to express and reads the sentence using an appropriate facial expression. Listeners have to guess the emotion. Some sample sentences are given on Handout 4 'Sentences for facial expression exercise'.

Home-based activity 1

The client is asked to observe people around him and in the media and return to therapy with examples of how facial expression impacts on the message and affects the listener. The resulting discussion should focus on (1) the match (or mismatch) of expression between speaker and listener, (2) the intensity of expression (too much or too little), (3) the effect of limited expression, and (4) the way in which facial expression impacts on the conversation (that is, how it carries emotion rather than content). The feedback sheet (Handout 5) can be used to record the client's findings.

Home-based activity 2

The client is asked to watch the television or a DVD with the sound turned down and try to ascertain the content area (*what* is being said) and the emotion behind the words (for example, abstract, emotional, intimate, distant, academic). If a DVD is used, it can be replayed to see how successful the guesses were. In most cases it will transpire that the words carry the actual message but the expression carries much of the emotion.

Activities for gesture

Discussion ⓘ ⚙

Handout 6 'Gesture' can be used for information and discussion.

Range of gestures ⓘ ⚙

Each group member in turn performs a commonly used gesture (such as shoulder shrugging, hand rubbing). Another client or the clinician identifies the implied meaning of the gesture. The activity ends when no more meanings can be thought of. The purpose of the activity is to demonstrate the enormous range of gestures in common usage. Alternatively, and in individual therapy, gestures can be written on cards for a client to act out. Ideas for cards are given on Handout 7.

Identifying gestures ⚙

In front of the group, each member has to demonstrate something he did the day before, by using gesture alone. The other group members have to guess the activity. More subtle activities can be put on cards for a participant to act out (refer to Handout 8). This exercise demonstrates just how much information can be gleaned without the use of speech.

Activities for posture¹

Discussion

Handout 9 'Good posture' is used to inform and as a basis for discussion.

Using posture

Group members are given cards on which specific postures are described (see Handout 10 'Posture exercise'). In pairs, they carry out a conversation using the given posture and report back to the group the effect, if any, this had on both participants.

Posture questionnaire

Handout 11 'Posture questionnaire' is used by group members working in pairs. Each member reports back on his partner's posture. Areas to work on can then be targeted for home practice.

Home-based activity 1

Handout 12 'Posture: home practice' is given out and then used as a basis for follow-up discussion on the effect of posture on the listener, the speaker and on speech.

Home-based activity 2

A client observes people speaking to one another at a distance, where the words cannot be heard, and is directed to watch their posture. A television programme or DVD can also be used for this exercise. From others' posture a client aims to ascertain the following:

- how each person in the conversation is feeling
- if one person is in control
- whether all participants are being honest
- if the atmosphere is generally friendly or unfriendly
- the status of each participant in the group.

Home-based activity 3

A client experiments with different postures (using Handout 10 'Posture exercise' if appropriate) and observes what effect the postures have on the listener and on his communication. He may, for example, stand while having a conversation with a seated boss, sit forward to show interest in what someone is saying, slouch in a chair with feet on a coffee table. The results of these experiments can be discussed in therapy sessions.

Listening skills

Often people who stammer tell us they are good listeners. They sometimes base this on the fact that they are generally less active in conversations than more fluent speakers. We would question whether silence and listening are synonymous and suggest that often when people who stammer are quiet, it is because there is too much inner activity going on for them to be able to focus sufficiently on the other person. They may instead be planning their next word, working out if they do actually have to speak, and if so, whether they can change any of their words. To be a good listener it is not enough to be quiet; the person must actively listen and demonstrate by their behaviour that they are doing so.

¹ Our thanks are due to Lisa Gill and Justine Ben-Yosef, who at the time of writing were 3rd year speech and language therapy students on placement with us. They carried out a session on posture for our group and are responsible for the posture handouts in full or in part.

Activities

Brainstorm

Brainstorm 'features of a good listener'. Alternatively, this exercise could be introduced as a question: 'If you were to watch a video of a good listener with the sound turned off, what would you see?'

Trios exercise

In threes (speaker, listener, observer), with each participant performing each role in turn, the speaker tells of a recent event that has concerned him. The listener has to practise good listening skills. The observer checks on the 'Observer checklist' (Handout 13) those skills that have been used and notes any that have been omitted. Alternatively, clients first identify specific skills they wish to have monitored.

Discussion

The group has a discussion on a given subject, preferably one that is emotive and likely to encourage a lot of participation. The rule is that no one can make his point without first summarising what the person before him has said. At the end of the discussion, reference can be made to statistics that show that we only remember about a quarter of what is said to us.

Story reading

Four or five volunteers are requested for this activity. They are taken out of the room and one is given a short story to read and remember (see Handout 14 'Story for listening exercise'). This person and one of the other volunteers are brought back into the room and the one who read the story is instructed to retell it to the other. The rest of the group use Handout 15 'Checklist for listening exercise' to help them spot which points are remembered and which are forgotten in the telling of the tale. The next volunteer is then brought in and the person who has been told the story has to repeat the version he has been told (which is usually rather different from the original!). This process is repeated by each of the volunteers in turn, who tell the story as they have just heard it. The last person tells the story to the whole group. Once the story has been told by the last volunteer, feedback is given to each of them as to the kind of things they remembered and the things that were forgotten. In our experience, the following things are noticed in most groups:

- The beginning of the story seems to be more easily remembered than the end.
- Names, eg 'Dagenham', 'Ford', are often recalled.
- Trivial information may or may not be recalled.
- If the actual sense is lost, people try to make their own sense of it and will reinvent the story, adding and leaving out bits of the original in order to do so.
- People vary a great deal in their ability to recall.
- A written story is more easily remembered than a spoken one.

Home-based activity

A client uses the 'Listening skills observation exercise' (Handout 16) to find examples of good and bad listening skills in his everyday life.

Activities for monitoring the listener

Using 'soaps'

In this activity, a pre-recorded excerpt from a soap such as *EastEnders*, *Hollyoaks* or *Coronation Street* is used. A client looks at the recording with the volume turned off and is then asked, on the basis of the body language, to interpret (1) what the characters may be saying, (2) what they are wanting to say but not actually saying, and (3) what they are feeling. A client should support his opinions with specific behavioural examples such as, 'He is feeling angry. He is standing close to her and staring at her hard. He is also using threatening gestures, such as finger pointing. I think he is saying something like "I am warning you"'.

Home-based activity

The client chooses one conversation per day when talking to someone with whom he feels comfortable. He listens and looks for one of the following:

- What does the person say to indicate he has not understood?
- What does he say to encourage the client to continue to speak?
- What signs are there that the other person may have lost the thread of what the client is saying?
- What clues are there that the other person is finding what the client is saying of particular interest?

Conversation skills

An adult who stammers will have spent many years adapting his conversation in order to try to hide or avoid stammering. As a result, conversations may be cut short, social niceties may be omitted, or, because of avoidance levels, a person may lack the practice to develop skills in some basic areas. There are times when, in addition to looking at non-verbal communication, we also need to help a client learn to converse better. We are certainly not suggesting that people who stammer are the only ones who can benefit from such training, nor that all who stammer need it. There are many people in the general population who lack skills in certain areas. Here we merely present a few ideas as to what might be covered if input in this area is felt to be necessary.

Conversation skills training is clearly most effective as part of a group therapy programme and can be used at any stage in the therapy process. We find the topic is best introduced as a 'theme' which is covered in one or two sessions and then followed up by a client devising his own targets, based on what he has learned from the sessions about his own conversation skills. For example, if he finds starting off a conversation particularly difficult, then this will be the area he will work on.

These skills can also be taught once a client has learned techniques for controlling his stammering, but may still need practice in order to integrate them into conversation. Having to think about what to say as well as using a technique can be hard, and these exercises provide useful practice in a safe environment.

This is a huge subject and we are only able to cover some basic topics which clinicians can then use to select and develop ideas and activities. It is useful to break conversation into specific component parts. We have found the following useful areas to consider: greeting, starting and keeping a conversation going (initiating/changing/continuing topics) and parting.

Teaching conversation skills

Greetings and introductions

For someone who stammers, greetings and introductions can be fraught with anxiety. Specific words are generally required ('Hello', 'Good morning'), and perhaps a name has to be said which cannot be avoided or changed. Often the spoken part is felt to be so difficult for the person who stammers that he does not even consider the impact of non-verbal aspects, such as facial expression, eye contact, proximity and so on.

Activities

Discussion

Discuss non-verbal aspects of greetings. A client explores how a person shows someone his intentions as he approaches others. This exercise can be extended by having two lists of cards, one with situations written on and the other with methods. A client takes one card from each pile and tries to act the two out together. Some will fit together and be appropriate, others will not, and this can be discussed. Here are some ideas for cards:

Intentions

friendly
in a hurry
wanting a long chat
wanting a brief chat
unfriendly towards the person
embarrassed at seeing them (perhaps you should have contacted them before).

Methods

smiling
frowning
looking at your watch
looking down
using good eye contact
talking while moving
stopping
showing little facial expression
starting a topic of conversation.

Opening statements

In a circle, a ball is thrown to a group member, who makes some sort of greeting or introductory statement such as 'Hello, isn't it a lovely day?', 'Hi, I've not seen you in ages', 'How are you doing?', 'I'm Jackie', 'I'm Trudy. Haven't we met somewhere before?' The person who catches the ball has to throw it to another group member, who gives a different opening response. The exercise continues until each group member has had several turns or messages start to be repeated. In this way, clients have the opportunity to 'play about' with different remarks and see what they feel comfortable with. In our experience, clients often seem to feel

almost that they are 'compelled' to use a very limited set of words and that they are 'cheating' if they use any other. This exercise can show the range of acceptable opening gambits that are actually available. The implications of avoidance behaviours need to be discussed too; there can be little difference sometimes between 'experimentation' and avoidance.

Role play 🗨️

Role play different sorts of greetings and appropriate non-verbal and verbal behaviours.

Situations could include the following:

- being introduced to someone new at work: a boss, a colleague or a visitor
- meeting someone at a social event whom you have met before and would like to get to know better
- meeting an old friend and wanting to re-establish a relationship
- running into someone you know only slightly
- meeting someone you do not like but with whom you feel the need to be civil but not over-friendly
- going into a local shop
- meeting a new neighbour for the first time.

Introductions in a social or public setting 🗨️

In this type of setting, introductions are usually made in one of two ways: a request for information, such as 'Do you have the time?' or 'Can you show me how to work this machine?', or through the use of conventional asides such as 'Isn't it a lovely day?' or 'Wasn't it a great game?' These can be role played, with appropriate responses to indicate whether the other person wants to continue, such as a furthering of the topic or a return to a newspaper after a brief response.

Getting the conversation going

Breaking the ice with the use of 'non-task' topics is often a good way of starting a conversation. Subjects such as the weather, uncontroversial aspects of the latest news and comments about the specific situation people are in are the most common subjects. It may be useful to point out that many people are trained to use such strategies for a variety of reasons, for example, a doctor or dentist (to put the patient at ease) or a salesman (to engage the person before moving in with the real intent).

Activities

Role play activities for ice breaking

Public setting 🗨️

- A doctors' surgery: people arrive sporadically for their appointments, first giving their name and appointment time to the receptionist. They sit down in the waiting room. Ice-breaking activities are initiated. The receptionist announces that the doctor has been delayed.

- A bus stop: the bus is already 10 minutes late and it is a cold day. Each participant is given a card with an ice-breaking remark he has to introduce into the conversation: for example, 'These buses are never on time', 'The shops will be closed by the time I get there', 'They say it's going to rain later on'.

Private social setting ⓘ ⚙

- A wedding reception: the photos are being taken. As above, participants have cards with remarks they must use: for example, 'Doesn't the bride look beautiful?', 'Is it a buffet or a sit down meal?', 'I do hope it doesn't come on to rain'.

These activities obviously work most effectively in a group. They can, however, be adapted for use in individual therapy. Therapist and client can together compile a list of ice breakers and then use the situations above to role play short snippets of conversation, using the ideas they have elicited. We have also press-ganged secretaries, receptionists and other therapists into taking part in these role plays!

Keeping the conversation going

Conversations can, of course, end at any point. Some get no further than the greeting: for example, 'Hello, how are you?', 'Fine thanks, yourself?', 'Fine'. Others stop at the ice-breaking stage. As conversations proceed, 'meshing' skills are used. These bring speaker and listener skills together. It can help to think of three areas for conversations: content, timing and turn taking. Understanding how these areas work together in conversations can help people who lack confidence in communication to have a structure on which to base their conversations, and to identify and work on any problem areas.

Content

Content refers to 'what' is said and to how ideas expressed continue or change.

Timing

The normal pattern for timing is that one person speaks and when they stop the other person starts to talk without undue silence or interruption. Stammering can affect timing adversely. One scenario is that the person who stammers leaves an over-long gap before he takes his conversational turn (as discussed below). Another scenario is that the listener interrupts him when he is stammering, for a variety of reasons. He may think that the person has finished talking, be embarrassed at the silence, or try to supply a word that the person who stammers is getting stuck on.

Turn taking

When someone stammers, turn taking can be especially problematic, because of difficulties in initiating and sometimes in terminating speech. Often there is a sense of urgency in what the person who stammers says; a feeling that once started, he has to finish at all cost. Developing strategies to make turn taking easier can give the person more of a sense of control.

Activities

Activity for content

Discussion

Handout 17 'Keeping the conversation going' is given as a basis for discussion. In group therapy, clients can break into pairs to practise these ideas. A client can be given starting sentences, examples of which are given below.

- I really hate Christmas shopping.
- I am finding it very difficult with my son. He is being really naughty.
- I am so looking forward to some time off.
- There is a yet another supermarket opening near us.
- I went to a great new restaurant the other day.
- I really like watching Formula One. It's so exciting.

Alternatively, a client is given a theme such as 'leisure' and experiments with each of the three styles discussed in the handout, looking at the relative value of each: (1) disclosing similar information, thoughts and ideas about a similar topic, (2) talking about a similar topic but disclosing different information and/or feelings, and (3) maintaining the same feelings but changing the topic.

Activities for timing

Discussion

Discuss turn taking and reasons why 'correct' patterns of turn taking do not always occur. The following are just a few possibilities.

- One person is not listening to the other.
- The listener does not notice or pay attention to 'hand-over cues', such as reduced eye contact, lowered pitch, forward body posture.
- The listener does not know what to say.
- The listener is too eager to get his point across.

Mistiming

One person speaks and the other gets the timing wrong: he either interrupts or leaves it too long before responding. The effect on the listener is discussed.

Activities for turn taking

Video

Pairs of clients have a conversation which is videoed. The videos are played back and group members observe the turn-taking skills used well and less well.

Discussion ⓘ ⚙️

Discuss the specific difficulties of silence due to stammering. Ideas are generated as to how to deal with these (refer to the section on dealing with silence in Chapter 7 'Desensitisation').

Social routines

Social routines are used in order to confirm and support relationships. They include giving and receiving praise, compliments, support, encouragement, help, apologies, congratulations and sympathy.

Activities for social routines

Discussion ⓘ ⚙️

Discuss which social routines a client finds easier and which more difficult to express. Consider the relevance of the stammer to this. In a group setting, each can be role played and feedback given.

Specific social routines

Giving compliments ⚙️

In a circle, group members take it in turns to pay a compliment to the person on their right. That person has to respond appropriately. For example, person A says, 'That's a lovely outfit you are wearing', to which person B replies, 'Thank you. I like it too' (and not, 'What, this? It's an old thing I've had for years').

Offering support and encouragement ⓘ ⚙️

Group members (or the therapist in individual therapy) are given cards with good and bad statements written on. Other members (or the client in individual therapy) have to make an appropriate response. Examples of openers could be:

- I've won the lottery.
- My grandfather has just died.
- I've got a new kitten.
- My wife is pregnant.
- My car has been vandalised.
- My son has been made redundant.
- I have a stammer.

Offering help and receiving offers of help: discussion ⓘ ⚙️

Ideas are pooled on how to offer help and how to accept or refuse politely. Difficulties clients have in this area, especially relating directly to stammering (such as finding specific words or people difficult to talk to), are discussed. Clients and therapist take turns to think of alternative ways of behaving. These can also be role played if only two participants are required.

Role play

Situations can be role played in which one person offers help to another and the other refuses or accepts. Real-life experiences which group members have encountered can be used as an alternative or addition. These situations can be played in the same way as they happened, and then, after discussion; as the person would now aim to carry them out. Ideas for situations are:

- Someone is going on holiday. Their neighbour offers to look after the dog, or check the newspapers and milk are not delivered, or go in and draw the curtains.
- A person's car breaks down. Someone offers to drive them to their destination in their own car, or call the breakdown services, or lend them their car.
- One person asks another for a loan of £20.

Offering congratulations: discussion

Discuss the non-verbal and verbal responses which may be used and the appropriateness of each in different situations and with different people: for example, 'Well done', 'Good on you', 'Congratulations', 'I knew you'd do it', a pat on the back, handshake, smile. In a group setting, two subgroups could each identify such behaviours under the headings 'non-verbal responses' and 'verbal responses'. These behaviours are then put on cards and group members in turn pick up a card from each pile and act out a situation they have encountered where congratulations were in order. The clinician and/or other group members comment on the appropriateness of the verbal and non-verbal responses for the person to whom they are given.

Role play

Look at ways in which someone might handle a situation where congratulations are in order but the person giving the congratulations has reservations about the situation. Possible situations to role play might be:

- One person tells a good friend he has become engaged. The other person may or may not like the fiancée.
- It is your parents' wedding anniversary. They have/haven't been getting on too well recently.
- Your best friend has a promotion. He will have to move away.
- A member of a sports group to which you belong tells you he has been asked to play in a higher league.

Closure

Merely stopping talking is not an adequate way of ending a conversation. There needs to be some form of closure which takes place and is recognised by both parties. The type of closure used will depend upon a wide range of factors, such as whether the relationship is to continue and, if so, on what basis, whether both people are in agreement as to the timing of the parting, the background and expectation of both parties, and so on.

There are four ways a conversation can be closed:

- 1 factual – as in a summary or a conclusion
- 2 motivational – a suggestion of an idea to ponder
- 3 social – such as leaving the conversation showing it has been of use ('I've enjoyed talking to you')
- 4 perceptual – for example, a verbal closure ('Goodbye') or a non-verbal closure (taking a step back).

Understanding this routine may help a person who stammers to place less emphasis on the final words of parting, which can be a particular concern if those words are feared. Some people who stammer find it hard to end conversations for this reason and may prolong them unduly.

Activities for closure

Routines

In pairs, people work out possible routines. Clinicians can first demonstrate with an example such as the following:

Person A: Well, I think I've got a good idea now about the sort of computer I should be looking for.

Person B: It might be a good idea to buy a magazine to see what meets those specifications at your price.

Person A: Thanks a lot for your help.

Person B: It's a pleasure. I look forward to seeing you again. Cheerio for now.

Person A: Bye!

Clients should use situations from their own experience for this exercise.

Use of recorded extracts

The clinician videos 'partings' from films, media interviews and so on. Alternatively, two clinicians can role play partings in front of the group. A client is instructed to be aware of the non-verbal as well as the verbal aspects of the final parting. A client observes and makes a list of the non-verbal ways people show they are parting. The list is likely to include the following:

- a parting position, such as standing up if seated, moving towards a door or moving back
- a handshake
- a touch on shoulder
- a kiss
- a smile
- a wave.

It should be pointed out that sometimes there is no need for a specific 'goodbye' word.

Brainstorm

Brainstorm all the possible words or phrases which can be used in parting, such as 'goodbye', 'cheerio', 'cheers', 'adieu', 'auf wiedersehen', 'au revoir', 'ciao', 'bye', 'goodnight', 'ta-ta' and so on. The suitability of each for different situations can be discussed.

Home-based activity

A client 'tries out' parting words he does not usually try and reports back on how they were received and how he felt saying them.

Non-verbal behaviour

It is estimated that the verbal (what we actually say) aspects of speech carry one-third of social meaning, while the non-verbal aspects carry two-thirds. Working on this aspect of communication can therefore pay dividends.

What is non-verbal behaviour?

It includes vocal behaviour (tone of voice, rate of speech, volume, intonation) and also facial expression, gesture, eye contact and posture.

What is it used for?

- 1 It can be used to give messages without speaking: for example, a smile when someone sits down next to you on the bus tells them that what they have done is acceptable.
- 2 It is also used to say more than the words themselves. It conveys the emotion attached to the words or reinforces the message: for example, we may say something is big but a gesture with our hands can show just how big.
- 3 Some gestures are used to contradict the verbal message: for example, a school child may say 'Yes Sir' when asked if he is sorry for a misdemeanour, but the confident way in which he stands implies he is far from sorry!
- 4 Non-verbal communication can be used by a person to indicate that he has finished talking and is giving his 'turn' to someone else, for example, by lowering his volume, changing pitch or looking at the person.
- 5 It may be used to give feedback, for example, showing concern or joy through facial expression, gesture or touch.

Increasing eye contact when stammering

A person who stammers often finds it difficult to look at the person he is speaking to. This may be caused by embarrassment or fear of seeing an adverse reaction. However, very often poor eye contact only serves to increase the listener's own embarrassment and to make a negative reaction more likely.

Increasing eye contact when you are stammering is not easy. You are likely to have been reacting in this way for several years and it has probably become a well-established habit. The following steps can help:

- 1 Work first on your eye contact as a listener. Observe people as they are talking to you. You may find it easier to do this if you set yourself a task, such as looking for the colour of their eyes, the shape of their nose, the size of their ears and so on.
- 2 Look at yourself in a mirror at home. You might want to start by 'pretending' to stammer. Throw yourself into a really big block or repetition and keep looking at yourself. Do this until you can do it without feeling anxious. For your next step you might have a conversation with someone close to you (having told them first what you are planning to do) and then look in the mirror as you talk to them, making sure you keep eye contact with yourself when you stammer. Again, keep doing this until your anxiety subsides.
- 3 Now have the conversation but look directly at the person. Ask them to tell you if you look away during a stammer.
- 4 Using the mirror again, make a telephone call and maintain eye contact in the mirror.
- 5 Try to use good eye contact with other people. Start with those you find it easiest to talk to. You may find it helpful to tell them what you are trying to do and to ask them to remind you if you start to look away when you stammer. Work up gradually, trying it out with increasingly 'difficult' listeners. If they avoid eye contact with you, try not to let it deter you from keeping eye contact with them.
- 6 Try and increase the number of people you use your good eye contact with. Set yourself targets and increase them gradually. Slowly but surely you will learn to replace your bad habit with a good one. Don't expect to change the habits of a lifetime overnight, but do expect to change them in time!

People's bingo: eye contact exercise

When you speak to someone during the week ahead, observe one of the following and record your observations on the sheet as soon as possible after the conversation.

The colour of their eyes	Are they wearing make-up?	The shape of their head	The number of times they smile
The bushiness of their eyebrows	The size of their ears	Are they wearing earrings?	Do they wear glasses?
Is their eye contact appropriate?	Their hairstyle	The colour of their hair	The length of their eyelashes
The length of their hair	How prominent are their cheekbones?	Their most obvious facial feature	The size of their nose

Sentences for facial expression exercise

You make me so angry when you do that

That's absolutely amazing!

That is a terrible thing to have happened

You must be thrilled

Just get out and don't come back

I've had a terrible shock

I've passed all my exams with distinction

I'm feeling really faint

I've booked a trip to Florida

Whatever did you do that for?

My friend is expecting triplets

Leeds United won the Cup Final

I can't find my wallet anywhere

Can't you do anything right?

Where on earth have you put that book?

I wish you weren't going

It's ages since I've seen you

I can't stand her

I told you so

Feedback sheet

Person you observed, eg friend, relative, person being interviewed on TV	Did the speaker seem genuine?	How well did the speaker's facial expression match what they were saying?	Did the speaker use too much/too little/the right amount of facial expression?	How well did the listener's expression match the speaker's facial expression?

Gesture

Gesture is thought to be used for four main reasons:

- 1 Instead of speech – these sorts of gestures (for example, nods, shrugs of the shoulders, a 'thumbs up' signal or a wave of the hand) are generally universally understood within a culture. They may be used as a form of shorthand or in situations where speech is more difficult (for example, a noisy or quiet environment, or when someone is some distance away).
- 2 To make speech more descriptive – for example, we may say something is small but if we indicate the size with our fingers it makes it more real and in some cases more dramatic.
- 3 To show our feelings about something – for example, we may take a step back in disgust or put our arms around someone to show we care.
- 4 Some gestures, often used without our conscious awareness, are those which express our feelings, often when we are finding it difficult to manage them. Twisting our hair may, for example, be an indication of anxiety, while tapping our fingers may illustrate boredom.

All these gestures are widely used by all speakers, fluent or not. For a person who stammers, however, sometimes they are over- or under-used.

Over-use of gesture may be because a person:

- is trying to distract the listener from their speaking
- feels their speaking is not adequate to express what they want to say
- wants to avoid speaking as much as possible.

Under-use of gesture may be because a person:

- the person is anxious about communication as a whole
- has considerable body tension
- prefers not to draw attention to himself in any way.

When working on gesture, it is important to be aware of the following:

- 1 It is important not to use either too much gesture, which can be distracting for the listener, or too little, which can make you appear tense or less interesting.
- 2 The same gestures may have different meanings in different settings and in different cultures.
- 3 Gesture should not be forced, but should feel and look natural.
- 4 Gestures should match your feelings; if they do not, other people may become suspicious about what you are saying.

Gesture cards

Rub your hands together

Shrug your shoulders

Thumbs up

Thumbs down

Pretend to throw salt over your shoulder

Wring your hands together

Throw your head back in the air

Scratch your head

Suck/bite your fingers

Put your index finger on your chin

Hold a clenched fist in the air

Place both hands on your hips

Point your finger at someone

Stick out your tongue

Screw up your face

Put your hand over your eyes

Hold your hand out to be shaken

Nod your head

Shake your head

Clap your hands

Raise your eyebrows

Tap your fingers repeatedly on your knee or on the table

Bite your bottom lip

Suck in your cheeks

Activities to act out using gesture alone

- Talking to an elderly, deaf person
- Talking to a young child
- Teaching a child to ride a bike
- Listening to someone in a noisy pub
- Being examined by a doctor
- Examining a rash on your arm
- Buying a watch
- Buying ingredients for a cake
- Buying a hat
- Watching a violent TV programme
- Watching a sentimental film
- Having a candlelit dinner for two
- Queuing for a bus
- Arguing at a counter about a mistake the bank has made
- Sitting through a boring concert
- Waiting for an important phone call
- Visiting someone with a newborn baby
- Waiting to have a painful tooth extracted
- Asking a favour
- Apologising for a serious mistake

Good posture

There are many benefits to good posture:

- 1 It is a basis for good breathing, which is essential for speech production
- 2 It helps you to move in an efficient manner
- 3 It ensures your internal organs are not restricted and helps with circulation
- 4 It keeps your bones and joints in the best position for your muscles to work well
- 5 It adds strength or increased meaning to what you are saying
- 6 It helps you look confident
- 7 It helps you feel more in control

Good standing posture

- Keep your body aligned: stand as if you have a string fixed to the top of your head which is keeping you erect
- Try to feel your spine lengthen and do not slump or round your shoulders
- Keep your head central in your body with your chin up but not tense

Good sitting posture

- Where possible use a chair that is at a good height to support your back and allow your feet to rest flat on the floor
- Do not slouch
- Keep your shoulders relaxed and dropped down slightly (not hunched)

At work

- Try not to hold the phone between your head and your shoulder as this can cause tension
- If you use the phone a lot it would be beneficial to use a special headset
- Make sure any computer screens and chairs you use are at the correct height to avoid strain

Posture exercise

Stand up straight

Sit slouched

Sit rigidly

Lean forward

Sit with your feet on another chair

Clasp your hands behind your head

Face away from the listener

Fold your arms and legs tightly

Stand and keep moving from one foot to the other

Sit with your legs on another chair

Rock back and forth on your chair

Sit the wrong way round on the chair

Stand with your hands on your hips

Posture questionnaire

In pairs, ask each other questions about *your own* posture, generate ideas and be prepared to feed back to the group about your partner.

1 What aspects of my posture do you think are good?

2 What aspects of my posture do you think I need to work on?

3 Do you think that my posture affects my speech and/or communication in any way?

4 What message does my posture give out to other people?

5 Can you give me one practical tip to help me improve my posture?

Posture: home practice

As a starting point to working on your posture, try out each of these postures when you are in conversation.

Use them at varied times in your regular day-to-day activities (eg at work, at home, in the pub) and with a varied range of people (eg friends, family, colleagues, strangers). Try and do each one for about five minutes and note down the following:

- (i) The effect it has on your **speech** and **communication** as a whole (include **how others react to you**).
- (ii) At least one adjective to **describe a person displaying that posture** (eg lazy, confident, rude).

Be prepared to discuss with your clinician and/or other group members!

1 Sitting slumped forward in a chair, shoulders hunched

(i)

(ii)

2 Standing or walking bent forwards, eyes on the ground

(i)

(ii)

3 Sitting upright on the edge of a chair, hands tightly clenched

(i)

(ii)

4 Sitting with hands and arms relaxed and legs slightly apart, maintaining eye contact with someone

(i)

(ii)

5 Sitting with arms folded and legs crossed

(i)

(ii)

Handout 12.2
HICK
A. J.
NO
K

6 Sitting slumped back in a chair, fiddling with the objects from your pocket (eg keys, money)

(i) _____

(ii) _____

7 Sitting while the other person is standing

(i) _____

(ii) _____

8 Standing while the other person is sitting

(i) _____

(ii) _____

Observer checklist

Skill	Observed	Not observed
Kept appropriate eye contact		
Sat in appropriate position		
Looked relaxed and open		
Appeared interested, showed facial expression		
Did not interrupt or take the speaker's turn		
Used natural gestures as appropriate		
Did not fidget		
Used verbal prompts, eg 'mm', 'I see'		
Asked questions to clarify, if necessary		
Did not 'judge' or offer advice		
Did not take over the subject, maintained the speaker's topic		
Tolerated silence, if appropriate		

Story for listening exercise

A farmer in Lincolnshire had a corrugated iron roof put on his barn. Strong gales in the autumn blew the roof off and when the farmer found it two fields away it was twisted and mangled beyond repair.

A friend and lawyer advised him that the Ford Motor Company would pay him a good price for the scrap metal and the farmer decided to ship the roof to the company to see how much he could get for it. He crated it up in a very big wooden box and sent it off to Dagenham, marking it plainly with his return address so that the Ford Motor Company would know where to send the cheque.

Twelve weeks passed and the farmer didn't hear from Ford. Finally, he was on the verge of writing to them to find out what was the matter when he received a letter from them.

It said, 'We don't know what hit your car, mister, but we'll have it fixed by the fifteenth of next month'.

(Source unknown)

Checklist for listening exercise

	Volunteer 1	Volunteer 2	Volunteer 3	Volunteer 4	Volunteer 5
1 A farmer in Lincolnshire					
2 Corrugated iron roof on barn					
3 Strong gales in autumn blew roof off					
4 Found two fields away					
5 Twisted and mangled beyond repair					
6 A friend and lawyer					
7 Ford Motor Company					
8 Good price for scrap metal					
9 Crated it up in a very big wooden box					
10 Dagenham					
11 Marked plainly with return address					
12 Twelve weeks passed					
13 On verge of writing					
14 Received a letter					
15 We don't know what hit your car, mister					
16 Fixed by the fifteenth of next month					

Listening skills observation exercise

During the week, observe people around you. Write an example of someone you see using each of the good or bad listening skills outlined in each box.

Someone who interrupts	Someone who is non-judgemental	Someone who does not check out information that is unclear	Someone who accepts what others say to them
Someone who avoids giving direct advice	Someone who does not attend fully to the speaker	Someone who gives direct advice	Someone who undervalues a person's problem by describing a worse event that happened to them
Someone who does not undervalue another person's problem	Someone who clarifies information when it is unclear	Someone who gives the speaker their full attention	Someone who does not interrupt
Someone who is not accepting of what another person says	Someone who gives the speaker the impression that there is time for them to talk	Someone who appears judgemental about another person's problem	Someone who fails to give the impression that there is time to talk

Keeping the conversation going

Content involves what we say and how 'themes' pass from one person to another. This can happen in one of three ways.

- 1 We mention similar thoughts and ideas about the topic under discussion, for example:

Person A: I've been looking at holiday brochures. Everything is so expensive. It's a bit of a worry, but I don't want to let the family down.

Person B: Yes, it worries me too. I don't know how anyone finds the money.

- 2 We talk about a similar topic, but the information or the feelings we discuss are different, for example:

Person A: I've been looking at holiday brochures. Everything is so expensive. It's a bit of a worry, but I don't want to let the family down.

Person B: Yes, I have too. I've been saving up so it's not a problem for me.
or I don't have that worry. I don't enjoy holidays; I'd rather stay at home.

- 3 We maintain the same feelings, but change the topic. An example of this sort of content is as follows:

Person A: I've been looking at holiday brochures. Everything is so expensive. It's a bit of a worry, but I don't want to let the family down.

Person B: I've been looking at the price of an iPod. My son wants one for his birthday, but I'm concerned I'll have to disappoint him.