Advice for People Newly Diagnosed with a Voice Disorder

Goals

Participants will (1) identify challenges associated with living with a voice disorder; (2) list techniques and tools that can help with the challenges; and (3) recognize and tell some positive aspects of living with the challenges.

Background

People who are newly diagnosed often have questions about how to cope well with a voice disorder. Those who have more experience living with the condition may have tools, tips, and techniques that they can share that will encourage and help the newly diagnosed. Also, it is helpful for the more experienced people to see the positive progress that has occurred in their own lives.

This activity is easily adaptable. It can be completed in one setting using a selected number of topics or divided into smaller sections and finished over multiple meetings. We have included several potential topics. This list is not exhaustive and can be added to as you consider your group members' experiences, needs, and interests.

We suggest that you record the questions and responses and compile a document to distribute to your members, both current and future. This is not required to use the activity. The topics could be examined individually for an ice breaker exercise or as a way to begin meetings ("social check in").

Instructions

For each of the chosen topics follow the same basic steps. *Note: The wording for the prompts are examples and may be changed accordingly.*

1. Tell and describe the topic. Explain how responses will be shared. Give the prompt, "There will be challenges. Please list some challenges that you have experienced (insert topic)."
2. Allow time for participants to write answers and then share responses together.
3. Consider all of the challenges provided or distinguish which of the responses will be used for the next part. Explain how participants will be asked to respond. Give the prompt, "There are ways we can help with the challenges. Please list some ways that help you overcome or lessen the burden of the challenges."
4. Allow time for participants to write answers and then share responses together.
5. Give the prompt, "Sometimes there are benefits to having the obstacles and funny occurrences that take place because of your voice disorder. Please list any positive outcomes and funny situations that have happened as a result of the trials."
6. Allow time for participants to write answers and then share responses together.

Topics to Discuss

- Thinking about something other than your voice
- Getting support/Building a support system
- Telling others about your voice disorder
- Handling work obstacles
- Making the treatment decision that is right for you
- Staying hopeful while waiting for future treatment options and cures
- Working through relationship changes
- Techniques for everyday communication
- Responding to comments about my voice
- Dealing with the ups and downs of treatments/Good voice and bad voice days

Participants' Responses

- Part I, listing the challenges, will most likely yield the most feedback. Choose a response method that will be conducive for lots of sharing.
- Identifying and listing the challenges can be completed without further discussion about individual items. Part II, identifying and listing ways to help, is a good place to allow for more discussion. Participants can describe, explain, and elaborate as time allows. The final part of the exercise, listing the positives, will most likely yield the fewest responses. Some of the answers will be thought-provoking and funny. This is a good section to allow participants to share verbally.
- Vary the methods as you gather responses.
- Be prepared to offer some ideas if needed on possible responses. Try to offer as few as possible to allow more participation from attendees.
- Have a way to collect the responses and communicate how it will be conducted. *Tip*: For the in-person meetings, ask for a volunteer to take notes or have the participants/groups write on paper that will be collected at the end. For online participants, capture the comments written in the chat and enlist a volunteer to take notes for the verbal responses.

A few methods for sharing responses explained:

Round Robin | Leader calls on participants to share verbally. This method can be challenging with a larger number of participants. *Tip:* If you are hosting a hybrid meeting, call on both in-person and online participants to share. This will help the event to feel more cohesive.

Chatterfall (also called Chatterfloat, 1-to-All, Chatterstream) | Leader instructs everyone to listen to the question, consider, write their response, and wait to show their response ("to hit enter" if online). Leader gives the prompt, and participants write their answers. The leader waits a brief length of time, and then says, "Go." Participants

all show their answers at the same time. After the answers are shown, group members are asked to read the responses silently. After allowing time for reading and reflection, volunteers tell their impressions. If needed, prompt questions may be asked to get the discussion started ("Are there any responses that surprise you?" "Are there any responses that you relate to?" "Are there any responses that brought additional questions to mind?") *Tip:* If this is an online meeting, have everyone write their responses using the "chat" function. If this is an in-person meeting, participants could write on white boards or pieces of paper. If this is a hybrid event, use both methods.

Raised Hand or Signal | If your group is small, participants could raise a hand to be called on to share, both online and in-person. *Tip:* If online only, participants could type a predetermined, signal word/letter (stack, Q ("queue"), next, ...) into the chat. The leader could call on participants to share in the order they are entered.

Small Group Sharing | Divide into small groups. Have each group share freely and compile the list of responses. Have someone from each small group share highlights with the large group

Example | Topic: Techniques for everyday communication

Part I: There will be challenges.

Question: "Let's talk about everyday communication. We know firsthand there are challenges. What have you found to be the hardest part of everyday communication?" (If needed, give some examples: drive thru, noisy environments, phone, ...)

Respond: Use the "Chatterfall" technique and/or white boards to gather responses. Discuss as desired.

Part II: There are ways to help.

Question: "As we consider the list of responses, are there tools or techniques that you have found that help you in any of these areas?"

Respond: Instruct attendees to jot down their thoughts (chat, white boards, paper). If your group is large, break into smaller groups to share answers. If your group is smaller, use a Round Robin to call on individuals to share or call on participants who volunteer to respond by raising a hand. *(If needed, the leader could give the following prompts as examples: Use a white board to show your order at the deli counter. Enlist a friend or family member to make the phone call.)*

Part III: There are positives.

Respond: Using the same topic listed above, ask if anyone can think of a positive aspect or has a funny story to tell. Allow individuals to share. It might be more difficult for attendees to think of a positive, but once a few are shared, other ideas should come.

Resources

University of Minnesota Extension. (2020). Four tips for leading online meetings.
https://extension.umn.edu/community-development/four-tips-leading-online-meetings

Dulski, J. (2020, March 19). How to Run Awesome, Large Virtual Meetings. Linkedin.
https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-run-awesome-large-virtual-meetings-jennifer-dulski

Mind Tools Content Team. (n.d.). How to Run Effective Virtual Meetings. MindTools.
https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/running-effective-virtual-meetings.htm

Reach Partners Inc. (2021, January 18). Virtual Meetings Made Meaningful.
https://www.reachpartnersinc.com/blog/virtual-meetings-made-meaningful