

Put a Spell on Stuttering

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As soon as the teacher said we were going to take turns reading I felt a panic in my chest. I counted the seats ahead- I was going to be seventh in line to read. I scanned my paragraph for words I might stutter on. I worried if the kids would say or do something. Was I under a spell?

Stuttering can seem to put a spell on us. It can seem to temporarily take control of our mind and body. Stuttering commands us to push and fight with our lips, tongue, and voice. Stuttering wants us to fear it; maybe even avoid talking or changing words as to not feel it happen. What is so bad about stuttering anyway? Why is the spell so powerful?

I say STOP the battle and put a spell on stuttering.

I was watching J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* recently. I saw several metaphors to stuttering. In one scene Ron, Harry, and Hermione fall through a trap door into Devil's Snare- a vine that would suffocate them if they resisted and fought against it. Hermione- a star student at Hogwart's- recognized the plant, stopped fighting, and fell to safety. She yelled at Ron and Harry to do the same. After a terrifying fight with the vines the stubborn Ron and Harry finally did trust her and just relaxed. They fell to safety and Hermione saved their lives.

Maybe this thing called stuttering could be named the *Stutter Snare*. The more you fight against it the worse it gets. This means both the physical struggle that makes the stutters and the thinking and mental wrestling.

Hermione also mentions that Devil's Snare hates sunlight. Sunlight robs the plant of its power. We should shine a light on stuttering. Expose negative thoughts and put a spell on them- say **no** to those thoughts. Shine a light on ways that we push and struggle and then decide to relax instead. Use speech techniques like easy onsets, pull-outs, and patience to rob the stutter of its power. Take your wand and shout: "Relaxus Talkus!"

I (Katie) have pushed too hard on the /k/ in my name and made speech blocks. This happens when I introduce myself to strangers and fear what they will do if I stutter hard on my name. I (Tim) used to block real bad on my last name- for the same reasons. The stuttering put a spell on us that we should get embarrassed if we stutter on our name. The spell commanded us to push and fight- to force the word out. That is how we got caught in the *stutter snare* with our names. We had to put a spell on stuttering and say: "I

am more than stuttering. I will not feel shame if I stutter. I will not fight with you.”
Poof!! That helped free us from the snare.

The most obvious mention of stuttering was the character Professor Quirrell. In the end we discover that Professor Quirrell faked stuttering as to seem aloof and not draw attention to his plotting with the evil Voldemort. When he faces off with Harry Potter he says: “...who would suspect p-p-poor st-stuttering P-professor Quirrell.” I did not like this portrayal of someone who stutters as incompetent. Do you? We are powerful.

We are big fans of Harry Potter and the author, J.K. Rowling. In speech therapy we have enjoyed discussing metaphors that we have connected to stuttering.

Throughout the Harry Potter series it is common for characters to say: “He whom should not be named” when referring to the villain Voldemort. Toward the end of *Sorcerer’s Stone*, Harry is calling Voldemort “you know who” and stumbling as he avoids saying **the word**. The Headmaster Dumbledore, Harry’s mentor, states “Call him Voldemort, Harry. Always use the proper name for things. **Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself.**” We think this is the most important metaphor in the book as it relates to stuttering. It reminds us of fearing our name or other common words. Stuttering does not deserve fear! Also, we should not fear saying the word stutter, talking about stuttering, or responding to questions about it. Many people who stutter tend to stutter on the word stutter. Maybe we get embarrassed and personalize having a stutter on the word stutter.

Stuttering is fertilized when we try to hide it and feel shame. Once again, shine light on it and weaken the vines grasp on you. Stuttering is what it means to us. We cannot let it define us.

People who stutter need to be visible and be heard. In the *Sorcerer’s Stone* Harry and his friends find an *invisibility cloak*. When this cloak is draped over them they are completely invisible to others. When people who stutter avoid talking, hide, and not share their valuable comments they may be hiding their stuttering from others. They are not, however, hiding it from themselves. Avoidance and fear will only make the vines grow and the stutter snare tighten even more. Take off the cloak, speak up, and be heard.

We have discovered many ways of fighting with stuttering that only make it worse. They include:

1. Changing words
2. Asking others to order food or make phone calls.
3. Avoiding talking in class
4. Pushing hard with our lips, tongue, and voice.
5. Getting all embarrassed
6. Trying to keep stuttering a secret.
7. Looking away while stuttering.
8. Fearing stuttering.

In the Harry Potter series a Muggle is someone who is not born into a family of magical powers. We know you can't just wave a wand and stop stuttering. The real magic is to stop fighting with it. Stop all the pushing and shoving. Stop the negative thoughts. We are more than stuttering. We are magicians in many ways. We are not simply Muggles. We will not get stuck in the stutter snare by wrestling with it anymore. Wizards in stuttering unite!

*Rowling, J.K. 1997. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. New York: Scholastic Press

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