



SESSION SUMMARY

Covert Stuttering Exposed

The final session of the Spring2Day Conference highlighted covert stuttering.

People who are covert stutterers are often able to conceal their stutter from others by using techniques to avoid particular words or speaking situations. Those who are covert about their stutter are sometimes able to pass as fluent to even their closest friends and family members. However, this continual effort to hide their stutter can cause covert stutterers to feel an overwhelming amount of anxiety during social interactions.

In the “Covert Stuttering Exposed” session, the host (Cathy Olish Maciejewski) and three panelists (Elaine Robin-Kruijd, Bob Wellington, and Will Nading) shared their journeys as people who have been covert stutterers for part of their lives, and they discussed the positive effects that becoming more open about their stutter has had on them.

A common theme during the session was the idea of growing up thinking of stuttering as a bad thing and the negative effect that this attitude can have on covert stutterers entering adulthood. The panelists expressed how, during their childhood, they were never told that stuttering was alright. It wasn't that the people around them made negative comments about stuttering, but the fact that their families seemed uncomfortable talking about stuttering made it seem that it was unacceptable to stutter.

This is a common reason why many people who stuttered as a child become covert when they get older. Having more people, both stutterers and non-stutterers alike, openly talk about stuttering would go a long way in creating a more accepting environment for children, teens, and young adults who stutter.

The panelists acknowledged the unique challenge that becoming more open about one's stutter presents. Wanting to fit in and be like everyone else is a common feeling and having a stutter can often make people feel like an “other.” However, all three panelists underscored the fact that stuttering more openly has led them to become more comfortable with their family, friends, and in their work environment.

As Bob emphasized during the session, you find out more about who you are every time you go through a scary experience and showing your stutter in front of others is often a scary experience.

A final theme discussed was that every person who stutters has a different idea of what's best for them in terms of approaching their stutter. The most important thing is that people know that they have different options for what they want to do with their speech.

The session had many participants who felt that the panelists' stories resonated with their own experiences, and several audience members discussed their own journeys in the Zoom chat. Here are some of the key quotes from the event:

- *"My whole life, I wanted acceptance from others without having to change myself."*
- *"I had never acknowledged to anyone that I had stuttered until the current job I have. I have told people and talked about it with people, and it's made the experience much better than anyone before."*
- *"Fear is not something that we should hide from, fear is there to show us that we need to pursue whatever it is we're afraid of."*
- *"I have a lot of things I'm doing with my life, a lot of things I'm meant to be here for...fluency is way, way overrated."*

Author Danny Chiarodit is originally from North Hollywood, CA and is currently attending the University of Pennsylvania where he studies psychology. After graduating in May, he will be applying to graduate schools to earn a PhD in clinical psychology. Danny is involved with the Philadelphia NSA Chapter and volunteers his time as an NSA Ntern.