

Real life: Dave's Story

Dave's stammering therapy had a transformative effect. His story is introduced by his therapist Steph.

Dave had seven stammering therapy sessions delivered by telemedicine over the course of four months.

Dave works for a large company and is married with two young children. When he first came for therapy, he told me his stammer was holding him back in his career and socially. He never took his children out on his own, as he worried in case anyone asked him what their names were and he couldn't answer. On a 0-10 scale, he said he was at a 2 when he decided to ask for help, and would like to get to 8.

Straight away, Dave pushed himself out of his comfort zone. After our first session, he forced himself to make some phone calls, which he would normally have avoided. He also spoke to some colleagues about his stammer. Their response was that they'd always wondered about it but never felt able to ask about it. Once they knew, they were very supportive. Dave also took his kids to the park and for something to eat. He talked about how great that felt – like being a normal dad. He then spoke to his mum about it, which he'd never really done, and they discussed some things from his adolescence which helped him to understand why it might have become such a problem for him.

We looked at the mechanics of speech and what happens when you stammer, and experimented with some fluency techniques, mainly around breathing. After four sessions, Dave said:

"I can do everyday things that 'normal' people do. I used to see people chatting and think, "I wish I could do that", and now I'm able to. I would have been hungry and wanted some food and thought, I don't want to go in there and order something, but now I do. It's amazing what you can do! It's like having a normal life!"

By the end of therapy, Dave had spoken to his manager about things and talked about going for an interview for promotion. He had set up an online self-help group within the organisation for other employees who stammer. He had written to the CEO asking what help she would give them. He had gone to a local meeting about the proposed closure of his sons' village primary school and asked lots of questions – afterwards lots of people said they were glad he'd been there because they wouldn't have dared speak out.

At our last session, Dave put himself at 9.5 on the 0-10 scale.

"I've never been as happy as I am now, because of opening up to everyone and having the confidence to talk about it. I've never been able to do the things I do now. It feels great to know I'm not relying on my wife to ring up for me. It's normal stuff, which I wouldn't have done. I hope you can help other people because it opens up so many avenues. It can change your life. I've been in some dark areas and now I look at myself and I'm really happy with myself."

Six months later Dave emailed me to say he'd changed roles at work and was now in the job he'd always wanted.

To find out more about the service email airedale.stammeringtherapy@nhs.net