

Henry

The problems - the people

At the age of 7, Henry had a severe stutter and had not responded to behavioural treatment. His mother was very anxious for his future, and his father, who had stuttered himself as a boy, hated the idea of therapy and declared that 'the little blighter will grow out of it'. This disagreement between the parents was something of a stumbling block for a while, and it was some time before the father would consent to discuss it and agreed to a meeting. He believed that his wife spoiled their only son, who was born when they were in their forties and, an ex-policemen himself, he couldn't bear any sign of 'weakness'. The mother, Marion, was rather timid and apologetic and clearly quite frightened of her husband. Nevertheless, she dug her heels in and brought her son along.

At first, Henry said very little and eyed me (Peggy Dalton) suspiciously. He hadn't liked his former therapist and hated the work he did with her. We negotiated six sessions during which we would not only experiment to find the most useful way of 'smoothing his speech down' but to give me a chance to get to know them and they to see whether they were comfortable with me. I say 'they' because parents are often crucial in helping a dysfluent child. Speech work, which focused mainly on slowing the rate and aiming for a natural smoothness, continued parallel with PCP procedures, and within six months Henry was fluent in many situations, which enabled us to work on other aspects of communication and relationship that had been affected by his stammering. Here I shall concentrate only on the PCP aspects of what I did.

During those early sessions, among other things, Henry completed a rated grid, which Marion then filled in as if she were her son. This was to discover how well she was able to see things through his eyes, and she was quite happy to do this. Figures 11.1 and 11.2 show their two versions. Let us look at Henry's first. The elements he chose were his parents, his best friend, two other boys in his class, one of whom he disliked, his 5-year-old cousin Tim, his aunt and two teachers, one of whom he liked and the other he didn't. He also rated 'me as I am now' and 'me as I'd like to be'. He seemed to enjoy a great sense of potency as he filled in the numbers!

The constructs were elicited by asking him to compare two of the people at a time with one another. He clearly shared his father's emphasis on strength and weakness, which also formed part of a structured conversation we had at one stage. (This is a procedure suggested by Tom Ravenette, where the practitioner introduces leading statements for the child to pick up.) He had been talking about fighting and had just said that if any girl beat him in a fight he'd 'bash her head in'!

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strong	4	1	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	3	3
nice	1	1	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
funny	3	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
likes to fight back	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
kind / helpful	1	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
happy	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
not naughty or silly	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
doesn't give me things	3	2	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
not strict	2	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
I talk well with....	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
I don't talk so well with....	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
has courage, brave	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

Figure 11.1 Henry's grid.

Therapist: You're strong are you?
 Henry: Not really strong. People say I'm quite weak.
 Therapist: Why?
 Henry: My muscles.

Therapist: Would you like to be very strong?

Henry: Twenty times as strong as all the people in the world put together!

Therapist: What else would you like to be?

Henry: To have wings as hard as diamonds that could cut through anything.

Notes from Marion.
*Barry has fallen out of favour since Henry did his rating!
*I have not heard of this one!

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
strong	3	2	3	1	2	3	3	3	2	2	3
nice	1	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
funny	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
likes to fight back	4	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
kind/helpful	1	2	1	4	2	3	3	3	3	3	3
happy	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
not naughty	1	1	1	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3
not naughty or silly	1	1	1	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3
doesn't give me things	1	1	1	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3
not strict	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
I don't talk so well with....	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
has courage, a sword, scored,	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3

Henry' by Marion' ← 1 → 2 → 3 → 4 → 5

1	Mummy
2	Daddy
3	Denny (best friend)
4	Barry *
5	Me as I am now
6	Derek
7	Tim (cousin)
8	Aunt Edna
9	Mrs Peecher
10	Miss Robins
11	Terry *
12	Me as I'd like to be

Figure 11.2 Marion's grid on Henry.

How will it all end?

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When given 'When I grow up I'd like to be . . . ' as a lead-in, he said a policeman or a soldier or an astronaut. Policemen and soldiers in particular have to be 'strict' and, as you'll see, 'me as I'd like to be' is extremely strict. Many children of Henry's age make little distinction between themselves now and as they'd like to be, perhaps having difficulty in imagining themselves different from what they are. As he rated 'me as I am now' in the middle for quite a few constructs, however, and was quite definitely at one extreme or the other for most with 'me as I'd like to be' there is quite a large difference. It is often said that rating at the mid-point means that the person doesn't really know where to place him- or herself or another element. In Henry's case, he was quite clear that '3' meant that sometimes he could be at one pole and sometimes another. He could be nice or nasty, funny or serious, kind or unkind, happy or sad, brave or a coward, depending on how the mood took him.

Marion's rating, as if she were Henry, shows quite a close understanding of how he saw people. Her rating of how he sees her is very similar, although she was surprised (and rather pleased) that he saw her as 'not strict', as she felt that she was always having to chivy him. Her rating of her husband is more favourable than this. He sees his father as unkind and weak, which gave her pause for thought. As Henry's construing of 'strong' versus 'weak' was basically physical, rating his father '4' was probably due to the fact that he was disabled. In another part of the structured conversation the lead-in was: 'The best thing about daddy is . . . H: That he has a car and he's disabled and we can go near everything, even without a meter!'

Marion realized that she herself was using the construct more psychologically and this led to her considering how Henry must often use words differently from herself.

Henry's self-characterization was short and to the point:

My name is Henry. I live in London with my mother and my father and I wish they'd let us have a cat in the flat. My best friend is Denny and we are sometimes silly in class and get told off. I like fighting and want to be as strong as possible. It makes me sad that I can't talk properly and I want to talk like other people. I talk the normal way for quite a long time and then I start to chop up the words and people laugh.

It is unusual for a dysfluent child of this age to place so much emphasis on speech and this, as well as his including the construct 'I talk well with' versus 'I don't talk so well with' in his grid, indicated that he was already construing his stuttering as an important factor in his view of himself.

Marion also wrote a long sketch of her son, in which she spoke of her fears for his future, how little attention he received from other adults besides herself, how his teachers thought he was not very bright because he didn't put his hand up in class. She was worried by the teasing that

occurred at school, which Henry reacted to by withdrawal or, if really provoked, by fighting. She wrote at some length about Henry's determination to be 'strong'. Initially fussy about food, he would now eat anything so long as she assured him that it would 'make him strong'. She also spoke of his gentleness with younger children and babies and his love for his 5-year-old cousin Tim (who is very strong, very nice and one of the few definitely happy people in his grid). She showed concern about Henry's earlier dislike of his father but saw him as getting on much better with him now, describing their wrestling together in the mornings. (When I did meet the father, some time later, they wrestled then and it seemed to me that there was a good deal of ambivalence on both sides in their 'play'.) Marion ended her sketch of Henry with comments about his speech. She was clearly puzzled by his dysfluency and noted that he was at his best when talking to his toys or 'when he lapses into baby talk'.

By the end of the six exploratory sessions, Henry said that he was happy to keep coming as it was much more fun than the last one. Marion felt that the interest taken in what Henry was like as a person was very important and she liked the fact that she could do much to help but at the same time shared the responsibility with someone else. It was now the summer holidays and they were going away, so we agreed to meet regularly from September up until Christmas and to work on both fluency and Henry's difficulties at school, which were mainly to do with relationships. Father had reluctantly agreed that we should continue, although still clinging to the belief that Henry would grow out of it anyway. It was noticeable that he himself occasionally stuttered quite severely even now and he seemed very threatened by the experience, glowering at me as if daring me to comment. Of course I didn't.

The plan of action

A plan was drawn up largely on the basis of our sessions together, with the grid, the structured conversation, the self-characterization and some drawings Henry had done providing some useful material. He clearly needed to work directly on controlling his speech, but this would only be tolerable if 'speaking smoothly' felt better than chopping the words up. He had missed out on the sort of attention any child needs, so it seemed important that speaking smoothly should be validated at least by the adults in his life. The aunt in the grid was apparently fond of him but inclined to ignore him, talking away to his mother. She was slightly deaf and found Henry difficult to understand. So one aim was for him to speak so clearly to her that she would bother to listen. His father grew impatient when he stuttered, so speaking smoothly to him would also be an advantage. Henry often wanted to say things in class but was afraid to in case he became stuck. He read

well and fluently by now so the first step here was to offer to take his turn in class instead of being passed over. He stumbled badly the first time but wouldn't give up. Subsequently, his reading went very well and his contribution to classroom conversation developed naturally from this first experiment.

The teasing was something else to be tackled as soon as possible as he could not yet hope always to be fluent when speaking to the other boys. We looked at all the different ways he could respond to teasing and acted them out in role-play. (When he considered the advantages and disadvantages of 'the fighting approach' I had a taste of his 'strength', playing the part of his disliked classmate!) Withdrawal clearly wouldn't do any more - it was too close to 'a coward, scared' in Henry's mind, but dignified silence with a bored look proved acceptable. Joining in the laughter was tried and surprisingly seemed to work. Against his mother's better judgement, he also became adept at finding something to tease his opponent about. Within a few weeks, the teasing issue seemed to have become much less acute.

This gave us the opportunity to look at how Henry might develop easier relationships. He had only the haziest notion of what 'friends' might be like, and the most useful source for elaboration here was fiction. He loved adventure stories, and I began to draw his attention to the relationships between the children in them as well as the exciting action. It has been found that children of his age don't use many 'psychological' constructs when describing each other, but he was able to clarify how they behaved towards one another, the things they did together. They 'rescued' each other from danger; they fought off the enemy together and shared what they had, especially secrets. He seemed to have no difficulty in translating these actions into possible school situations, so his new constructs really did have meaning in his own context.

It seemed that, up until now, Henry had been rather passive in relationships, waiting for others to come to him, even failing to respond to others' suggestions if he was unsure of the outcome. He gradually began to initiate more, although he still found it hard to cope with 'rejection' if his ideas were not always taken up. At one stage his teacher, although pleased to see him 'coming out of his shell', expressed some concern to his mother about his 'imaginative' suggestions for activities during free play periods. Mother explained something of what we were doing and she took care to validate his new assertion even if she had to play down one or two of his wilder schemes.

During one of the early sessions, Henry had been asked to draw a picture of when he felt good and when he felt the opposite. Figures 11.3 and 11.4 below reproduce these drawings.

In the first, he is 'at a party' and sitting with his friend (Denny?). There are streamers and balloons and lots of food on the table. In the second, the

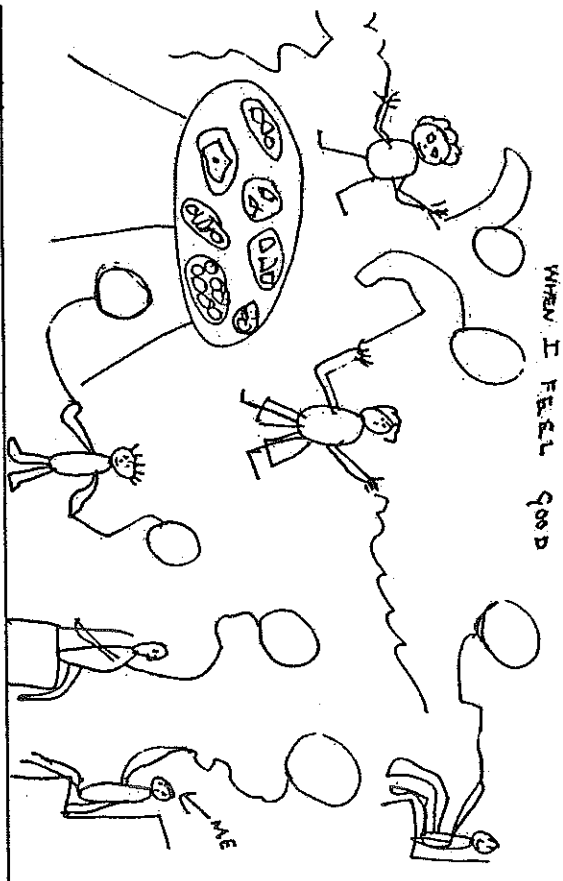


Figure 11.3 'When I feel good' drawing.

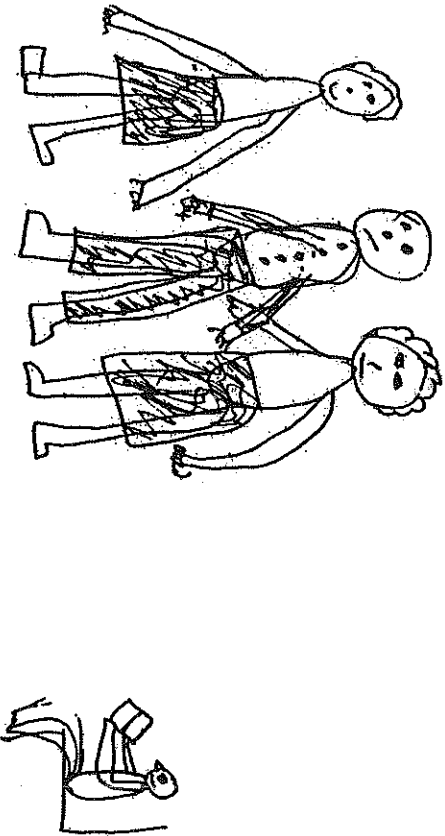


Figure 11.4 'I am bored' drawing.

'bored' picture, he is alone except for three taller figures some way away. This seemed vividly to portray his discomfort when 'left out' in adult company and paralleled something his mother had written in her sketch. Marion commented that Henry was invited to very few parties and then mentioned that he had never had a birthday party of his own but was

always taken out by his parents for 'a treat' instead. Their flat was small and they couldn't afford to take a party of children out. Nevertheless, with his eighth birthday coming up, Marion was determined that he should have at least a few children home and that there would be streamers and balloons. There was a tussle with father but he eventually agreed. As a result, Henry was invited back to other parties, as is the way of the world. Marion also took stock of the amount of time the boy spent as the odd one out in adult company and took steps to arrange for him to have a friend in on some of these occasions.

The outcome

Henry certainly benefited from his own and his mother's new approach to things and, by Christmas, seemed largely to have caught up socially and to be growing in confidence with his peers and with the teachers at school. Speaking smoothly was certainly proving worth the effort and he was able to slip into it more and more naturally. So, what more was there? When I asked Marion whether we should cut down the sessions after Christmas and gradually phase out, she seemed reluctant. There was one more area she wanted to 'sort out'. And that was the relationship between the three of them. *Was she in fact over-protective of Henry, particularly in relation to her husband? Could I help her stand up to him better on her own behalf?* This was a very different issue, so we agreed that Marion should come alone for some sessions and that Henry should come every three weeks to extend the work he was doing and make sure that all was going well.

The sessions with Marion don't belong to this account but they resulted in considerable experimentation on her part in handling things differently with her husband. They seemed to have talked together for the first time at any length about his bitterness at his disablement – she had always avoided mentioning it where she could, thinking this was best. And she hadn't realized what it meant to this 'strong' man to be unable to do things he had done in his youth. She understood that his pressure on Henry was some kind of compensation for his own loss and was able to negotiate some changes with him. I only saw the father once more myself and his manner was as scornful as ever towards 'this therapy nonsense'. But he *had* changed towards Henry, largely, I'm sure, through being able to communicate some of his feelings to his wife.

By April, Henry was coming once a month and we had our last session together in July before the summer holidays. He was now 8 years old and had decided that, although 7-year-olds might chop their words up, 8-year-olds didn't do so. As a final note, Marion said that, after his birthday, Henry no longer used baby talk – a play that had enabled him to be fluent earlier. We kept in touch for some time, and a letter from Marion several

years later told of Henry's thriving and enjoying life at a new school, where he had just begun to do drama.

The timescale of one year and three months, with sessions gradually spaced out, is a fair example of therapy that combines speech modification work with counselling for a child of this age, already construing his stammer as a problem. Things don't always turn out so well, of course, for a number of reasons. Here we had a mother who contributed a great deal and was willing herself to change. Dalton (1989) shows further examples of therapy where the mother's part is seen as crucial to the process. Henry had some clear superordinate constructs about how things should be for him, which could be used as guidelines when planning experiments. He also proved himself well able to create new constructs, such as those to do with friends. Despite the father's opposition, changes in the mother led to changes in their relationship that were helpful all round. There are many examples in Ravenette's writings (for example, Ravenette, 1977) of his sessions with children and young people that show different problems with varying solutions. He may sometimes see a child only once, get him or her to draw around the situation, talk about it and send the child off with something to think about. Although he will always follow up with the school to check on how the child is doing, they may not actually meet again. In other studies of his, counselling may be focused on a story that Ravenette tells in response to what the child brings. This imaginative approach, again, leaves the child with a new light on his or her predicament. In still other cases, of course, resolution of the problem at school takes longer and a wide range of exploratory and reconstruction processes are used, but the aim is basically to help all concerned to understand each other better and thereby change their approach to one another.

Sarah

The story

Sarah was an attractive, lively woman in her early 30s. On her first visit, she inspected the furnishings, gave advice on the cat and questioned me keenly on my qualifications and experience. In most respects, she was enjoying a full and successful life. She worked in film production and was pleased with the way things were going. She had good friends and good relationships with her parents and younger sister. She had recently bought a new flat and was 'having a wonderful time' decorating it and making it just as she wanted it. And as she painted this glowing picture she commented that perhaps she oughtn't to be coming to see me at all – she was very lucky. 'The problem' was a long time ago.

At the age of 10, Sarah had been sexually abused by a neighbour. He was a middle-aged man who lived alone after the death of his wife and whom her family scarcely knew. She told no one of the incident and soon afterwards he was in trouble because of another child and they saw no more of him. Her mother asked her if he had ever approached her or her sister and Sarah had said no. She had a feeling to this day that her mother wasn't satisfied, but it was never mentioned again.

Later, in her teens, Sarah took a dislike to boys and had only female friends. She dismissed boys as 'stupid' and 'oafish' and when she went to university she made no male friends there for the first two years. Then, during her third year, she started to go out with a young man and for a short time was very happy in his company. When she began to feel that he was attracted to her (and she to him?), she became afraid, and when he attempted to kiss her one night, she was sick. She avoided close contact with men after this for about two years, although she had quite good working relationships with men in her job. Then she began another relationship and the same pattern of fear and sickness recurred. She thought at this time of finding some help and talking to her mother about it but decided against both. She read everything she could on the subject and hoped that 'next time' she would be able to cope.

Then she met a man at work whom she immediately felt drawn to and was convinced that everything would be all right with him. It was – and they enjoyed a rewarding sexual relationship for about a year and became engaged. Then, without warning, he left her for someone else and moved away from London. She never really understood what happened and made light of it to her friends. At first Sarah didn't feel too much. She was 'sad' and missed him but the experience had been a good one and she had proved to herself that she was 'normal' and could push the past away.

A few months later, a man made a pass at her during a party and she fainted. It had all started again. After this she thought more and more about the man who had gone away and became very depressed. She spoke to no one at first and believed that no one realized how she was feeling. Then a friend told her about her own therapy and Sarah made up her mind, at last, to seek help. She wanted to 'blot out the past once and for all'.

When she had told her story, I outlined the personal construct approach and she agreed to four exploratory sessions so that we could gain a better idea of what might be involved, how long we might need to work together and so on. I also asked her to try to remember how she was as a child of 10, in an attempt to see what she might have brought to the experience at the time. She had feared that I would get her to describe the incident in detail and was relieved that I didn't. I suggested that it would probably be a matter of trying to make more sense of the effect of what had happened to her, not to push it away but to leave it behind as something which was over and