

How best to support children who stutter in interpersonal communication

EVIDENCE-BASED GUIDELINES

Stuttering is a complex fluency disorder, characterized by involuntary repetition or prolongation of sounds, syllables or words, or by involuntary hesitation or pauses that disrupt the smooth, rhythmic flow of speech. Its onset may be influenced by many factors, including neurophysiological, or genetic factors, as well as other non-genetic biological or linguistic factors. About 5%-10% of preschool children stutter. Although many children spontaneously recover, some continue to stutter long-term. Various risk factors, such as positive family history of stuttering, developmental or environmental factors, may influence the likelihood of stuttering persistence beyond early childhood. Among older children, adolescents and adults, the prevalence of stuttering is about 1%. Individuals who stutter may experience difficult feelings and negative attitudes about their speech, and they may try to avoid words and situations to help them cope with their stuttering. Some may even manage to conceal their stutter in public – this is called interiorized or covert stuttering. People who stutter may often become stigmatized, and unfortunately, too many children who stutter may become victims of school bullying. Social reactions to stuttering, especially in the immediate environment, and peers and teachers can have a major impact on children's daily functioning and quality of life – either positive or negative. Scientific research has shown a low level of knowledge about stuttering in society and the prevalence of stereotypes (St. Louis, 2015).

Take home message!

Based on the result of the quantitative and qualitative findings, some “universal” DO's and DON'Ts emerged when interacting with children who stutter. Some other kinds of support remain highly individualized, and should be discussed with the child. Some of these items were as follows:

- giving advice on what to do and how to feel;
- asking questions about stuttering;
- meeting other people who stutter.

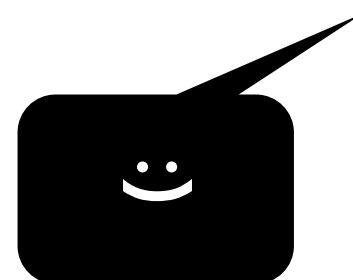
When interacting with a child who stutters, these guidelines are recommended:

When interacting with a child who stutters, be patient and friendly, while maintaining natural eye contact and body language. Focus on the content of the child's message, not whether the child is fluent. Avoid finishing the child's sentences or providing unsolicited recommendations. Be mindful that seemingly well-intended comments (e.g., telling the child to “slow down” or “think about what you want to say”) or actions (e.g. making a joke about stuttering) can often be undesired or unhelpful. Children who stutter will have individual preferences for responses they feel are helpful. It is important to establish a trusting relationship and talk openly with everyone to identify those preferences. Then they can receive maximal support from those with whom they communicate (adapted from St. Louis et al., 2017; 2019).

What is and what is not supportive, in the view of children who stutter, and of their parents

Do's:

- Maintaining eye contact.
- Being patient.
- Knowing about stuttering.
- Acting neutrally.
- Including the child.



DON'Ts:

- Laughing at the child.
- Finishing the child's words.
- Mimicking stuttering.
- Making a joke about stuttering.



More information at:
www.logolab.edu.pl
& <https://uit.no/project/logolab>

This material is based on the results of international research conducted among children who stutter, and their parents, using the questionnaire: *Personal Appraisal of Support for Stuttering–Children / Parents* (Weidner & St. Louis, 2015). The aim of the studies was to obtain a reliable answer to the following question: “What is and what is not supportive, in the view of children who stutter, and of their parents?” Several studies have been conducted, and there is an ongoing work to continue collecting information worldwide (more detailed information and a complete list of references can be found on the leaflet accompanying this poster, which is available at: www.logolab.edu.pl & <https://uit.no/project/logolab>).

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