

More about stuttering...

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).



Recommended readings:

- Byrne, R., & Wright, L. (2008). *Stammering, Advice for All Ages*. Sheldon Press.
- George, S. (2019). *Who Do You See? The Struggles of a Teenager Who Stutters*. Sean George Enterprises, LLC.
- Kelman, E., & Whyte, A. (2012). *Understanding Stammering or Stuttering: A Guide for Parents, Teachers and Other Professionals*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Lenz Holte, D. (2011). *Voice Unearthed – Hope, Help, and a Wake-Up-Call for the Parents of Children Who Stutter*. Holte.
- Lears, L. (2000). *Ben Has Something to Say*. Concept Books.
- Rabinowitz, A. (2014). *A Boy and A Jaguar*. HMH Books for Young Readers.
- Reeves, N., & Yaruss, J.S. (2019). *School-Age Stuttering: Information & Support for Parents*. Stuttering Therapy Resources, Inc.
- Reeves, N., & Yaruss, J.S. (2015). *School-Age Stuttering: How Teachers Can Help*. Stuttering Therapy Resources, Inc.
- Schneider, P., & Kohnmaescher, A. (2017). *My child stutters – what can I do? A guide for parents and all those who have to do with stuttering children*. Natke Verlag.
- Scott, J. (2020). *I Talk Like a River*. Neal Porter Books.
- Silverman, E-M. (2017). *Jason's Secret. Complete Edition*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Stewart, T. (2016). *Stammering. A resource book for teachers*. Routledge.
- Vawter, V. (2013). *Paperboy*. Delacorte Press.

For more information visit:

- Arctic University of Norway: www.uit.no/project/logolab
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association: www.asha.org
- British Stammering Association: www.stamma.org
- International Fluency Association: www.theifa.org
- International Stuttering Association: www.isastutter.org
- LOGOLab: www.logolab.edu.pl
- National Stuttering Association: www.nsastutter.org
- Stuttering Foundation: www.stutteringhelp.org
- Stuttering Home Page: www.mnsu.edu/comdis/kuster/stutter.html

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

DO'S:

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



DONT'S:

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



How best to support children who stutter in interpersonal communication?

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 general guidelines are recommended:

- Be patient and friendly.
- Maintain 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).

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 details can be found at: www.logolab.edu.pl & <https://uit.no/project/logolab>).

References:

- St. Louis, K. O. (2015). Epidemiology of public attitudes toward stuttering. In: K.O. St. Louis (Ed.), *Stuttering meets stereotype, stigma, and discrimination an overview of attitude research* (pp. 7–42). West Virginia University Press.
- St. Louis, K.O., Irani, F., Gabel, R.M., Hughes, S., Langevin, M., Rodriguez, M., Scott, K.S., & Weidner, M.E. (2017). Evidence-based guidelines for being supportive of people who stutter in North America. *Journal of Fluency Disorders*, 53, 1-13.
- St. Louis, K.O., Węsierska, K., Saad Merouwe, S., Abou Melhem, N., Dezort, J., & Laciková, H. (2019). How Should We Interact with Adults Who Stutter? Let’s Hear from Them. In: D. Tomaiuoli (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Stuttering* (pp. 172-183). Erickson.
- Weidner, M.E., & St. Louis, K.O. (2015). *Personal Appraisal on Stuttering Support–Child*. Populore.
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- Weidner, M.E., Węsierska, K., St. Louis, K.O., & Scaler-Scott, K.S. (2019). *Supporting Children Who Stutter: Experiences and Perspectives of American and Polish Parents*. Presentation at the World Congress for Stuttering. Hveragerdi, Iceland.
- Węsierska, K., St. Louis, K.O. & Weidner, M.E. (2019). *Personal Appraisals of Support from the Perspective of Polish Children Who Stutter*. Poster presentation at the International Association for Logopedics and Phoniatrics. Taipei, Taiwan.

Children’s opinions about what they would like to be known about stuttering:

- It is not a disease, it is my characteristic – not a defect.
- Stuttering is normal and I can live with it.
- Stuttering is not contagious.
- It is not my fault that I stutter.
- The fact that I stutter does not mean that I am a fool.
- People who stutter are just like everyone else.
- Be patient, it helps people who stutter very much if you just calmly and quietly listen to them.
- It would help if people knew what causes stuttering, that stuttering is not something to be cured, and what a person who stutters feels.

Caregivers’ opinions about what is the hardest part of being a parent of a child who stutters:

- Accepting the fact that my child stutters.
- Fully accepting my child’s stuttering.
- Answering my child’s questions: *Why do I stutter?*
- Fears that the community will not accept a child who stutters.
- Constant questions from others about whether we are doing something about our child’s stuttering and why he keeps stuttering.
- Awareness that my child may be avoiding certain challenging situations related to public speaking that stuttering can limit him and can affect his self-esteem or self-worth.
- Awareness that my child might not be accepted by his peer group because of his otherness.
- The fact that other people do not accept him or make fun of him or consider him to be inferior.
- Feeling helpless when it is impossible to help a child who is unable to say what he wants to say.
- Explaining to teachers how to collaborate with a child who stutters.
- Accompanying your child when he gives up or withdraws from verbal interactions.
- Concerns about the child’s future, that despite stuttering he has a good life.