



Established in 1998 and celebrated on the 22nd of October every year, International Stuttering Awareness Day raises awareness of the speech disorder that affects 1% of the world's population.

**What is stuttering?** According to The Stuttering Foundation, stuttering is a communication disorder in which the flow of speech is broken by repetitions (li-li-like this), prolongations (lllllike this), or abnormal stoppages (no sound) of sounds and syllables. There may also be unusual facial and body movements associated with the effort to speak.

**What causes stuttering?** There are four factors most likely to contribute to the development of stuttering: genetics (approximately 60% of those who stutter have a family member who does also); child development (children with other speech and language problems or developmental delays are more likely to stutter); neurophysiology (recent neurological research has shown that people who stutter process speech and language slightly differently than those who do not stutter); and family dynamics (high expectations and fast-paced lifestyles can contribute to stuttering). Stuttering may occur when a combination of factors comes together and may have different causes in different people. It is probable that what causes stuttering differs from what makes it continue or get worse.

**How many people stutter?** More than 70 million people worldwide stutter, which is about 1% of the population. In the United States, that's over 3 million Americans who stutter.

**What is the ratio of males to females who stutter?** Stuttering affects four times as many males as females.

**How many children stutter?** Approximately 5 percent of all children go through a period of stuttering that lasts six months or more. Three-quarters of those will recover by late childhood, leaving about 1% with a long-term problem. The best prevention tool is early intervention.

**Can stuttering be treated?** Yes, there are a variety of successful approaches for treating both children and adults. If you have concerns regarding your child's speech, please consult a **speech-language pathologist**.

Here are some therapy tips for parents and caregivers of children who stutter:

**\*\*Compiled by Barry Guitar, Ph.D. and Edward G. Conture, Ph.D.**

- 1. Speak with your child in an unhurried way, pausing frequently.** Wait a few seconds after your child finishes speaking before you begin to speak. Your own slow, relaxed speech will be far more effective than any criticism or advice such as "slow down" or "try it again slowly."
- 2. Reduce the number of questions you ask your child.** Children speak more freely if they are expressing their own ideas rather than answering an adult's questions. Instead of asking questions, simply comment on what your child has said, thereby letting him know you heard him.
- 3. Use your facial expressions and other body language to convey to your child** that you are listening to the content of her message and not to how she's talking.
- 4. Set aside a few minutes at a regular time each day when you can give your undivided attention to your child.** During this time, let the child choose what he would like to do. Let him direct you in activities and decide himself whether to talk or not. When you talk during this special time, use slow, calm, and relaxed speech, with plenty of pauses.
- 5. Help all members of the family learn to take turns talking and listening.** Children, especially those who stutter, find it much easier to talk when there are few interruptions and they have the listeners' attention.
- 6. Observe the way you interact with your child.** Try to increase those times that give your child the message that you are listening to her and she has plenty of time to talk. Try to decrease criticisms, rapid speech patterns, interruptions, and questions.
- 7. Above all, convey that you accept your child as he is.** The most powerful force will be your support of him, whether he stutters or not.