

## Practical Tips:

### Five Key Facts about Stuttering

#### **Stuttering is more than just a speech disorder.**

Although many people think of stuttering as primarily a speech issue, the disorder actually involves more than just repetitions, prolongations, and blocks. People who stutter may experience a variety of negative emotional reactions to the fact that they have difficulty speaking. Examples include feelings of embarrassment, anxiety, and shame, which can lead to tension and struggle while speaking or attempts to avoid talking altogether. Other people may also react negatively. For example, children who stutter are more likely to be bullied by their peers, and adults who stutter commonly report discrimination in the workplace. These reactions make it even harder for people who stutter to say what they want to say. Together, the speech disfluencies and the negative reactions can affect quality of life. Thus, we say, *“Stuttering is more than just stuttering,”* because the disorder can affect all aspects of a person’s life.

#### **Stuttering varies.**

People do not stutter the same way or the same amount in all situations. This may be one of the most frustrating aspects of the condition, for speakers cannot always predict when they will stutter and when they will be able to speak easily. Variability can also confuse parents, teachers, and peers, for they may wonder why a person is fluent in one situation but struggles in another. It is not because the speaker is not trying hard enough; it is just because *stuttering varies*. As speakers and listeners learn to expect and accept this variability, stuttering becomes easier to deal with.

#### **Stuttering is complicated.**

A century of focused research has led to many theories but only one truth: stuttering is not simple. It is not a psychological problem (though it can cause emotional distress); it is not caused by parents (though parents play an important role in how children experience stuttering); and it is not just a physical problem (though people who stutter do show subtle differences in both anatomy and physiology). Stuttering does run in families (so there is likely to be a genetic component), and it is associated with neurological differences (both structural and functional). *Knowing these truths can help people who stutter and their families learn to better understand what they are experiencing.*

#### **It is okay to stutter!**

People aren’t doing anything wrong when they stutter; they are simply trying to talk, just like anyone else would do. If they feel embarrassed about their speech or ashamed of being different, then they are more likely to struggle with speaking or try to avoid talking. This makes the problem worse and increases the impact of the disorder. When people know that it is okay to stutter, then they can communicate more freely and more easily. They can say what they want to say, even if they sometimes say it disfluently. Thus, *acceptance of stuttering is the key to successful communication!* Parents, teachers, friends, and others can help people who stutter by simply recognizing that what a person says is more important than how a person says it.

#### **Treatment can help.**

Although there is no universal cure for stuttering, treatment can help. Young children often overcome stuttering entirely (and many get better without treatment, though it is impossible to know which children will recover on their own and which will need help). Older children, adolescents, and adults may continue to stutter in some fashion throughout their lives, but with appropriate treatment and support, they can become effective communicators who are not held back by stuttering. *Treatment is most helpful when it focuses on more than just fluent speech.* Since stuttering is more than just stuttering, treatment for stuttering should address more than just the observable speech disfluencies. Addressing the whole disorder is the key to helping people reduce the impact of stuttering on their lives.