

## Practical Tips:

### ***How long should we wait before recommending therapy for preschool or young school-age children who stutter?***

We are often asked by clinicians and parents how long we wait before initiating therapy for young children who stutter. Following is an excerpt from *Early Childhood Stuttering Therapy: A Practical Guide* (Yaruss & Reardon-Reeves, 2017), in which we address this question (see p. 93):

There is no hard-and-fast rule about how long to wait until starting therapy. Many clinicians (like us) prefer to begin therapy sooner, rather than later, if there is an indication of an elevated risk for continued stuttering or negative reactions on the part of the child or parents. Other clinicians prefer to wait—sometimes up to a year or more (Ryan, 2000)—before initiating treatment. Put simply, we think that is too long.

While we understand the argument that many children will ultimately recover from stuttering without therapy, we are nevertheless concerned about their experiences (and the experiences of the parents) during that long year (or more). Is the child developing fears about speaking? Is he developing tension or struggle, avoidance behaviors, or negative attitudes about his ability to communicate? A year is a long time.

Even if we can agree that a year is too long, it is still hard to determine how long is long enough. In our work, we tend to use a time period of about 6 months since the initial onset of stuttering behaviors. Again, this is not a fixed time-period, but rather an estimate of how much time we are willing to wait before making sure that the child and family receive assistance. The rationale for this six-month period comes from research showing that parents tend to wait, on average, about six months before they seek the initial evaluation for their children's stuttering (Yaruss, LaSalle, & Conture, 1998). This says to us that—again, on average—six months is the amount of time that parents are willing to wait before they begin to become concerned enough about their child's speech that they seek out an evaluation. If six months is enough for them, it is certainly enough for us.

Of course, this does not mean that we would not treat a child who has been stuttering for less time. If a boy has only been stuttering for a month but has a positive family history of stuttering or already has negative reactions, then we would strongly consider recommending therapy (pending our review of other factors) even though the child has not reached the six-month time frame. Similarly, we might wait a bit longer than six months for a girl who has no family history of stuttering, no concern about stuttering, typical language skills, and a supportive family environment with appropriate speech and language models.

***As with all things, determining how long to wait before recommending therapy is a balance, but on balance, we prefer to act sooner rather than later if we have any indication of risk or concern.***

Much more information can be found in *Early Childhood Stuttering Therapy: A Practical Guide*, available at [www.StutteringTherapyResources.com](http://www.StutteringTherapyResources.com).