



Voice & Communication Skills Training

celebrating culture - improving clarity

How We Stutter

We may not always have a choice as to how we stutter, but we always have a choice as to HOW we stutter Dr Charles Van Riper

Stuttering is a chronic problem with many challenges which calls on those who stutter to be more than they might be. To tackle this problem you should have a coach, someone to instruct you and to inspire, listen and motivate you as well. You need to find an effective, experienced therapist with whom to work. Stuttering is a tough nut, and must be "cracked" using a variety of tools.

There are no easy answers to stuttering, but here is what you should consider:

Things You Should Know

1. You are not alone. One percent of adult and four percent of children on planet earth stutter.
2. There is every indication that stuttering has a physical cause. What exactly causes stuttering is not known. However, there is more evidence appearing each year which points to some neurological breakdown in the system of the person who stutters.
3. There is a familial and a gender bias. Stuttering almost always begins in childhood. It runs in families. Boys who stutter outnumber girls who stutter by at least 5 to 1.
4. Stuttering is not a psychological problem. People who stutter do not share any personality traits. It is neither a product of nervousness nor of poor self image. You do not stutter because you are nervous, rather you are nervous because you stutter.
5. People who stutter do not stutter all the time. Speech breaks-down differ to a different degree in different people who stutter. And within each person, there is room for much fluctuation. All people who stutter report to have "good" days and "bad" days.
6. People don't stutter generally when they: sing, whisper, speak in chorus, speak using an accent, speak to an animal, and, mostly, when they are alone or using automatic speech, such as days of the week, months of the year etc.
7. There is no therapy programme which will make you fluent without your working hard at your speech. There are no easy techniques that will make your stuttering go away. You must make the therapy work for you by making the necessary changes in your life and belief system.

Attitudes That Help

1. Avoid thinking of yourself as a "stutterer". Stuttering is something you do, it is not what you are. You are a person who stutters. Stuttering is only a part of you, not the whole of you. If you did not stutter, you would still be the same person.
2. Give yourself time. You have been stuttering for a while. Don't expect yourself to overcome all of your fears and change all of your speech habits overnight.
3. Make your life situations "stutterable". Expect yourself to stutter to some degree, especially in situations you have found difficult in the past.
4. Give yourself permission to stutter when you have "bad" days. Hang in there, and look forward to "good" days which will certainly come.
5. Never feel or demonstrate shame or feel you have to apologize for your stuttering. Stuttering is not your fault. You did not choose to stutter, and it does not reflect some weakness in your

personality.

6. Don't feel that stuttering is keeping you from being whoever you want to be. You have a right to be taken for the person you are, and quality of your communication, not for the cosmetics of your speech. Fluency is only one aspect of good communication.

7. It is your responsibility to educate the people you come into contact with about stuttering. Do not expect them to respond appropriately, if you are not up-front about it. People will generally react to your stuttering in the same way you do.

What To Do

1. Learn to like the sound of your voice.
2. Talk with as much aliveness and assertiveness in your voice as you can
3. Do not worry if you have a severe block. On the contrary, use the severe stuttering to give yourself permission to relax your standards and speak freely.
4. Speak in all situations you have avoided, and using words you fear. Make an effort to achieve this in a gradual way.
5. Take your time when speaking. This does not mean dragging out your words in a drawl, just give yourself more time to get out what you want to say and pause more than you do now.
6. Don't seek to hide your stuttering. For one thing, you are probably not succeeding. Avoiding certain words can make your fear and shame greater, and makes you less able to face the future.
7. Use good eye contact when talking and especially when stuttering.
8. Learn as much as possible about stuttering and teach others about it. People will respect you for your knowledge and your courage.
9. When appropriate, show a sense of humor about your stuttering. You will be amazed how much laughter can relax you and your listener. What you can laugh at can't hurt you.

Do not measure your progress by how many speech blocks you have. Real progress is measured by how much you do not let stuttering stop you from being yourself. As Erich Fromm said: "There is nothing of which we are more ashamed than of being ourselves, and there is nothing which gives us greater joy and happiness than to think, feel, or say what is ours".

To my friends who stutter: some considerations, by John Ahlback, National Stuttering Project, San Francisco, USA