

# Never Give Up

## The Process of Self-Initiated Recovery

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A first step in the recovery process is facing the realization that our stuttering is unlikely to magically disappear on its own. We must come to grips with the fact it will take some perseverance and determination to change the way we have stuttered over the years. Although this may sound difficult or impossible at first, constructively working at changing stuttering often demands less effort and frustration than continuing to fear it. We expend enormous energy in attempts to hide it, and/or push and force through it. And this increases the feelings of helplessness in the wake of its presence.

Because we are convinced that stuttering can be changed with determination and self-initiated effort, I want to briefly outline, on this Web site, some additional factors we can use in our efforts to weaken and even completely undermine stuttering.

## Understand the Physical Speaking Process

Producing speech is a highly complex process. However, paying attention to how we physically use our tongue, lips, and voice box as we produce sounds can help us understand how we often create more stuttering. We do this by tensing and forcing these structures as we attempt to deal with the unpleasant moments of stuttering. Of course these speech structures consist of muscles that need to be tensed to a normal degree in order to produce fluent speech.

In contrast, however, people who stutter often tense these muscles excessively, block, and then push forcibly to "break" through the block in their urgency to release themselves from the feeling of being stuck. This pattern develops over time as a

reaction to the little understood core cause(s) of stuttering, or what some of us refer to as the "stuttering trigger." In essence, the stuttering trigger is the present cause of stuttering. It may be associated with the inherited predisposition to be dysfluent that is found in the small percentage of the population who stutter. But that doesn't mean it can't be dealt with.

Once we begin to pay attention to our speech structures, we can better understand how we interfere with their normal functioning during stuttering. As we further develop and refine these monitoring skills, we will not only produce easier forms of stuttering, but we will become more fluent as we are less likely to "pull the stuttering trigger."

## Not to Recoil From Stuttering -- Instead, Move Forward

Once we understand the importance of eliminating much of the pushing and forcing in our tongue, lips, and voice box, we can begin to stutter more audibly and effortlessly by holding on to the stuttering moment while moving forward to the next sound.

When we work at stuttering audibly, we are better able to turn on and continue our air and voicing: two of the primary ingredients necessary for the production of normal speech. In contrast, due to the embarrassment and frustration often associated with stuttering, many people who stutter have learned to block silently at the tongue, lips, or vocal cords and/or recoil repetitively from their blocks and other dysfluent moments.

Attempting to speak in this manner interrupts both the flow of air and the necessary voicing created by vibrating vocal cords. This common process of trying to conceal and minimize the audible stuttering actually complicates speaking and over time, often increases the visibility and severity of stuttering.

Keeping the air and voicing turned on when we stutter takes time and practice at first because we are forcing ourselves to confront something that feels and sounds unpleasant and abnormal. Yet it is a necessary step in the process of learning to stutter in a

forward fashion.

### **Pay Attention to Feeling How and Where Your Lips, Tongue, and Voice Box Make Specific Sounds**

Once we have learned how the physical speaking mechanism functions, and we have worked on lessening our recoil behaviors, we can then begin to concentrate on how it feels to make the sounds and words as we speak. The vast majority of people cue into the sound of their speech as they talk. There is scientific evidence that auditory "cues" can be a present cause of stuttering. In contrast, many of us encourage people who stutter to focus on the "feel" of speaking and less to listening to their speech.

### **Opening Your Mouth When You Talk**

In order to counteract the tendency to stifle mouth opening as you talk, practice deliberate mouth opening as you repeat the sequence outlined above. The tendency for persons who stutter to "clench" or reduce mouth opening is a problem I find necessary to address when working with many adolescents and adults. This "clenching tendency" is actually reduced mouth opening that we learn over time as a result of our anticipating difficult sounds or words. This physical change in mouth opening (clenching) seems to result from the process of "holding back" the stuttering.

### **In a Matter-of-Fact Manner, Acknowledge That You Stutter**

We know that people who stutter often view their stuttering as embarrassing and shameful. As a result of such perceptions, we may shroud our stuttering in a "conspiracy of silence." Unsurprisingly, family, friends, and co-workers know we stutter, and are usually unsure of whether or not to maintain eye contact, look away, or fill in the words, etc. Such uncertainty may create uneasiness and discomfort in our listeners as well as ourselves.

However, much of the uneasiness and uncertainty experienced by both of us can be significantly reduced by acknowledging in an open and matter of fact manner that we stutter. For example, say something as simple as, "By the way, I'm going to use this opportunity to practice some speech techniques I've been working on lately. This is not an easy chore, but I know you understand why it is important for me to take this opportunity to practice as we speak."

This sample remark gives our listeners an opportunity to ask questions about stuttering, a communication problem that many people find intriguing. If we choose, it also gives us an opportunity to talk about it and "gives us permission" to openly practice some of the steps outlined in this chapter and throughout this book. Disclosure is a proactive strategy that affords us the opportunity to address our stuttering in a matter of fact and nonchalant manner. Doing so increases our comfort level because we begin to view our problem in a more positive light. This new perception eventually facilitates changing our view of stuttering as the "shameful unmentionable."

## Confront Stuttering By Occasionally Inserting Pseudostuttering in Your Fluent Speech

Many people who stutter cringe at the first suggestion that they should occasionally purposely insert a prolonged or repeated sound as they speak. Paradoxically, the voluntary insertion of mild, easy "stuttering" can be helpful in your quest to lessen your fear and apprehension of stuttering. Although you will hear yourself do this, listeners are usually much less aware of what you are doing because your voluntary dysfluencies are short and produced without excessive tension. Those who are recovering from stuttering often cite this task as one that helped them maintain their improvement during their recovery process.

## Never Give Up!

Changing stuttering requires persistence and determination. However, our recovery process actually demands less effort, struggle, and embarrassment than the negative emotionality

experienced when we live a life focused on hiding, concealing, and fighting stuttering. Hiding or fighting requires a huge amount of vigilance and surveillance, and this only tends to feed the destructive stuttering cycle. We have known many people who stutter, clients we have personally worked with and colleagues and professionals we have learned from, who have made substantial gains in releasing themselves from the handicapping grip of stuttering. Many have become so fluent that most people are unaware they sometimes still stutter.

This was our dream. This was their dream. This can realistically be your dream.

Please [contact us](#) if you live in an area accessible to Colorado and would like to learn more about stuttering recovery. We can also help put you in touch with therapy sources in other areas, as well.