

How best to support

adults who stutter

according to international

evidence-based guidelines

It has been estimated that about one percent of the world's population stutters (Bloodstein & Bernstein Ratner, 2008). *Stuttering* (also called *stammering*) is a multifaceted communication disorder, which is characterized by interruptions in the fluency of speech. Stuttering may be accompanied by struggling behaviors (*overt concomitants or/and covert concomitants*). What is more, a person who stutters may experience affective and/or cognitive reactions to stuttering. Most scientists and clinicians believe that stuttering results from complex interactions of multiple factors. Furthermore, it is perceived as a neurophysiological disorder with a strong genetic component (Yairi & Seery, 2011). Social attitudes towards stuttering are often negative. According to series of studies carried out as a part of *the International Project on Attitudes Toward Human Attributes* (IPATHA), unfavorable social stereotypes

regarding stuttering and people who stutter are still prevalent (St. Louis, 2005; 2015). Research findings indicate that stuttering negatively impacts the quality of life in many areas, e.g. vitality, social functioning, emotional functioning, and mental health (Beilby et al., 2013; Craig et al., 2009). For decades professionals have formulated various recommendations on how to behave when interacting with an adult who stutters – typically this information was based on their opinions and suppositions. In recent years researchers carried out studies to create evidence-based guidelines for the general public on how to interact in the most supportive way with adults who stutter. Two international studies – one conducted in North America, and the second in Europe and the Middle-East – have taken the opinions of people who stutter on how to formulate these suggestions (St. Louis, 2018; St. Louis et al., 2017; Węsierska et al., 2018). Overall, when interacting with people who stutter, it is important to be ready to identify with the individual's needs and struggles and to be flexible. The key is to tailor forms of support to a person's individual needs and respond in the most facilitating way.

How can you be supportive in the view of an adult person who stutters?

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Be engaging with me: try to maintain natural eye-contact!

Be patient: give me enough time to think and talk!

Your acceptance is important to me: try to be non-judgmental; show your empathy and compassion!

Support me as a person with friendliness, a sense of humor, and praise!

Remain as comfortable as possible: act naturally, be yourself, and focus on what I say not how I say it!

Be flexible about modifying your own interactions and sensitive to my zone of preference!

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- ASHA (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association): asha.org
- British Stammering Association: stammering.org
- International Fluency Association: theifa.org
- International Stuttering Association: isastutter.org
- National Stuttering Association: nsastutter.org
- Stuttering Foundation: stutteringhelp.org
- Stuttering Home Page: mnsu.edu/comdis/kuster/stutter.html