

# FRIENDS Stuttering Presentation Guide

FRIENDS wants to encourage and guide you in talking about your experience with stuttering to your class, your church group, your Boy or Girl Scout troop, or any other group of which you may be a part. What follows is why and how to do that.

## **What if our hair turned green periodically?**

Imagine if we had a unique disorder that caused our hair to turn green every once in a while. Perhaps it would happen once a week, or once a day, or five times a day. In any case, we rarely knew for sure when it would happen.

The question is, should we keep our green hair disorder a secret? Could we keep it a secret? Should we wear a hat all the time? Could we wear a hat all the time? Should we not talk about our green hair to anyone, neither our parents, our siblings, our relatives, our friends, or people we happen to meet? Would that draw more or less attention to it? Would that make it easier or harder to be who we are in spite of this hair problem?

I think it is obvious that talking about our green hair would make things easier. First, we could talk about what the causes and nature of it were: that it may be genetic, for example; that it happens more on some days than on other days; or that it may be the result of the lack of a certain chemical in our brain. Second, we could describe what it feels like to have this happen to us: how hard it is sometimes to have the disorder; how embarrassing it is sometimes; and, last but not least, we could describe green hair experience.

Stuttering is much like this. It only happens to a few of us, and it is as much our fault as hair that spontaneously changes color. It is a challenge life has given us, and we just don't have control over it all the time. Also, stuttering strikes many people as strange — perhaps not as strange as green hair, but strange nonetheless.

And it makes as much sense to try to keep it a secret!

## **Why should you make a presentation about stuttering?**

1) There is nothing good about hiding your stuttering. While stuttering is a scary experience, and it is only natural for us to want to avoid doing it, we only make things worse for ourselves when we try to hide it.

For one thing, it doesn't work. We cannot avoid it all the time. It does not make sense to live in fear that someone "will find out that we stutter." They will find out sooner or later, so why should we not be the one to tell them honestly and openly that we stutter. Then we can relax because we do not have that "secret" to keep anymore. It won't take the stuttering away, but it will make it easier. If the people we are talking to know that we stutter, and especially if they know because we have told them, it takes the pressure off of us. We don't have to pretend we talk just like everyone else anymore, and it gives people a chance to understand our stuttering and us.

And, hey, if you get up to present a report on stuttering, you don't have to worry so much about stuttering before that group. You can feel free to do it — you're, in effect, just modeling what you are talking about.

2) Stuttering is the thing we know the most about. One thing we can say stuttering does for us is it gives us an experience we can "teach" others about. We can become experts in it because we already know what it feels like. We cannot say this about our knowledge of insects, the American Revolution, or any other subject we might report on.

3) People will respect us after we present our stuttering to them. The young people we know who have given presentations about their stuttering report that the most common reaction their peers have is one of respect for them. "Man," many have said, "you have a lot of courage to get up and talk about your stuttering like that. I don't know if I could do that." They will respect your honesty and your knowledge about the problem of stuttering.

4) It will most probably silence anyone who has teased you about your stuttering. Teasing is tough to deal with. You can try to ignore it but that doesn't always make the person stop teasing you, at least right away. If you, however, get up and openly talk about your stuttering, it does not leave much for that person to tease you about, does it? We are teased because some person feels lousy about who he or she is, and wants us to feel bad or embarrassed, too. They also want to make public something we are trying to hide. Well, once you have "announced" your stuttering to your peers, it should take all the fun out of teasing you for that person.

AND, you might gain allies in your battle with that teaser. It is very possible that your other peers will come to your aid when you are teased. They might say to the person trying to tease you: "Hey, Freddie, didn't you listen to Tom's report? He cannot control his stuttering all the time. We think he's pretty cool because he knows so much about it. What do you know a lot about? Maybe you should try stuttering so you would know what it feels like?"

5) Stuttering is a fascinating subject young people —and old ones, too — will be interested in. Besides liking your presentation because they will respect you for doing it, your audience will also be interested in what you have to say. There are some very interesting aspects to the experience of stuttering. You can talk about the many famous people, past and present, who have stuttered, for example. (See the "What to Talk About" section below.)

### **When to make your stuttering presentation.**

As we said above, you can make your presentation to just about any group you are involved in, but most surely to your elementary or high school class.

What is very convenient is stuttering can lend itself to just about any subject. You can make a science report out of it because it has to do with how our bodies work; you can make an English report out of it because it is an experience you have; or you can work it into a social studies class because it is a universal aspect of human behavior — every culture we have ever studied has had people who stutter in it, and stuttering goes back at least to ancient Babylon — and because so many famous people have had the problem.

### **What to talk about in your report.**

1) The most important and effective topic you want to cover is your own experience with stuttering and how it feels to stutter. This will help you lessen your fear a lot, and you will be speaking from your heart. Talk about when you first began to stutter. What thoughts went through your mind at that time? What are some of things you did — or did not do — because you stuttered? How hard is it for you to give this report? (You might begin by admitting the most obvious thing: "I was really scared about getting up here.") How do you want people to act around your stuttering? Talk about things you may not like people to say: "You know, if you slow down and just relax, you'll be able to talk better." Talk about what things are hard for you to do.

2) Talk about the interesting aspects of stuttering. If you are working with a speech-language pathologist, he or she can help you with this. Here are some points to present:

— Stuttering runs in families. There is a very good chance that there will be at least two people in the family who stutter, perhaps one of your parents does or did growing up, or maybe an uncle or cousin.

— If one identical twin stutters, the chances are 80% that the other will stutter, too. If one fraternal twin (non-identical) stutters, the chances are only about 20%. This indicates that stuttering is something in our physical make up, a "tendency" we are born with, not something that we learn or something we do because we are "nervous." If being nervous caused people to stutter, a lot more people would be doing it all the time. A good way to explain this is to say: "I do not stutter because I am nervous, but I do get nervous when I begin to stutter. Wouldn't you?"

— About one percent of the people in the world stutter. This is true for every culture. No culture stutters more or less than any other.

— Boys outnumber girls who stutter about five to one. This is the same gender ratio we see for disorders like dyslexia, too.

— Some people will stutter a lot and some not so much, but all people who is true for you here.)

— Stuttering seems to have something to do with how we hear ourselves. In fact, when we cannot hear ourselves, we do not stutter. A device called the Edinburg Masker demonstrates this. It puts a "noise" in your ears when your vocal chords begin to vibrate. The stuttering will not occur for most people who stutter when it is on, even for people with the most severe stuttering.

— We will also not stutter when we are speaking in chorus with someone else (even someone else who stutters), nor when we whisper or sing or are talking to ourselves when we are alone.

— Various methods have been used to treat stuttering throughout history. One German doctor in the 1840's thought the tongue was too large in people who stutter and surgically removed part of it for some desperate people - it didn't work. Some experts have had people not talk for long periods of time (perhaps thinking they would forget that they stuttered). Some have had people talk to the beat of a metronome or to make a figure-eight with their finger when they talked. Another had people eating carrots.

We encourage you to do your own research about stuttering, too.

### **3) Talk about the famous people who have stuttered.**

We encourage you to use the FRIENDS poster in your presentation. In fact, if you are doing a presentation and do not have a FRIENDS poster, we will send you one FREE. Just contact us at 1220 Rosita Rd., Pacifica, CA 94044 or call 1-866-866-8335.

You can talk about the people on it and quote from their messages for young people. One thing to point out is how many different walks of life are presented there, from actors to writers (a lot of writers) to poets to athletes to photographers to film producers to artists.

Here is a list of some of the famous people from the past who have stuttered.  
You might type this out and pass it out to your class or group:

Moses (Read the story of Moses and the Burning Bush in Exodus)  
Aesop  
Demosthenes (famous Greek orator)  
Vergil  
Aristotle  
Isaac Newton  
King Charles I of England  
Erasmus Darwin (an eminent physician and grandfather of Charles Darwin)  
Charles Darwin  
Charles Lamb

Winston Churchill  
Lewis Carroll (author of Alice in Wonderland)  
Somerset Maugham  
Kim Philby (British spy)  
Clara Barton (founder of the American Red Cross)  
Marilyn Monroe  
King George VI of England

Contemporary people who stutter include:

Mrs. Annie Glenn (Wife of senator and astronaut John Glenn)  
James Earl Jones (The voice of Darth Vader was "almost mute" until he was 16 years old. He still stutters when, for example, he is giving an interview.)  
Bruce Willis  
Eric Roberts  
Carly Simon  
Greg Luganis (American diver)  
Lester Hayes (former NFL defensive back)  
Senator Joseph Biden  
Rep. Frank Wolf  
Peggy Lipton (Actress)  
Jimmy Stewart (Actor)  
John Updike (perhaps America's most respected novelist)  
Rowan Atkinson (the actor who portrays Mr. Bean)  
Bo Jackson  
Chris Zorich (NFL lineman)  
Ken Venturi (golfer who won U.S. Open in 1964)  
Ron Harper (guard for the World Champion Chicago Bulls)  
John Stossel (ABC 20/20 reporter)  
Dave Taylor (former L.A. Kings star)  
Bob Love (five-time NBA All-Star with Chicago Bulls)  
Robert Heinlein (great science fiction writer)  
David Shields (gifted young American novelist)  
Sam Neill (Australian actor - Jurassic Park)  
Jake Eberts (producer of such films as Dances with Wolves and Gandhi.  
Margaret Drabble (British novelist)  
Bill Walton (NBA star and now sports broadcaster)  
P.F. Bentley (Time-Life photographer)  
Adrian Peterson (top college running back at Georgia Southern)

There is a more complete list in the back of the Listen With Your Heart book.

**4)** Take a survey of the attitudes about stuttering of your class or audience or any group of people.

Either a couple of days before your presentation or at the end of it, have people fill out a survey, the results of which you can report on in Reaching Out. You may also just pass it out to a random group of people before you present and make the results part of your presentation. People are always interested how their attitudes relate to those of others. Your survey may also highlight some of the myths that people have about stuttering (for example, that it is a "psychological" problem that "nervous" people exhibit).

Here are some sample questions you might ask:

What do you think causes stuttering?

Do you think it runs in families?

Do you know someone who stutters?

What percentage of the population stutters: 10% / 5% / 1% / Less than 1%?

Who stutters more, boys or girls, or is there no difference?

Can you name any famous people who stutter?

Do some cultures or ethnic groups stutter more than others?

Has stuttering always been around, or did it just start happening in modern times?

Do all people who stutter, stutter in the same way and to the same degree?

Do people who stutter, stutter when they sing, too?

If you stutter, are there some jobs you cannot do?

Could a person who stutters become president of the United States?

What advice would you give a person who stutters?

Does Porky Pig make people who stutter seem stupid, clumsy and not very coordinated?

Can you think of a film that had someone who stuttered in it? If so, what did you think of that person? Was it realistic?

Can stuttering be cured?

Is stuttering a disability, like being visually, hearing or physically impaired?

**5)** When you are finished with your presentation on stuttering, write us about it so we can put your experience in Reaching Out. This will encourage others to make such presentations.

Tell us what it felt like to make the report. Were you very scared beforehand? How did it feel during it? What were the reactions of your class or group? What did your teacher or leader say? How do you feel now compared to before the presentation? If you took a survey, what were the results and what did you learn from them?

#### **6) Suggested Readings:**

In order to prepare for your stuttering presentation — or to ease your mind about it — we suggest the following from Listen With Your Heart:

"A Speech to Fifth Grade" by Alyssa Young

"I Slowly Got Up" by Vlad Tchekanov

"I Chose Stuttering" by Gino Sarti

"What I Taught My Teachers About Stuttering" by Maggie Hansen

"Levi's Math Teacher" by Debbie Zorn

Remember: We will send you a FRIENDS poster for your presentation.

#### **A Final Note:**

We at FRIENDS encourage you to make such a presentation on your stuttering, but we also want you to know that we respect you if you do not feel ready to do this. If you are like most of us, you have been hiding your stuttering a long time. It is not easy to change these feelings overnight.

So give yourself time. You will know when you are ready to do it.