

Listening

to Someone Who Stutters

Be a present-minded, respectful communicator.

1. Speaking is just one part of communication. Other parts include active listening, clarity of thought, tone, body language, & eye contact. Someone who is not speaking fluently can still communicate very well. Focus on their overall communication. Actively listen, like you would with anyone else, on what they're saying.

2. Practice common communication etiquette. Try not to finish sentences or guess words, unless you know the person very well. Your action could be taken as demeaning and of course, if you guess the wrong word, the difficulties multiply.

3. Do not give advice. Refrain from making remarks such as, "slow down," "take a breath," or "relax." The person is typically not stuttering because they are rushing or anxious, so such advice may feel patronizing and not constructive.

4. If you miss something, ask for a clarification. No matter how much the person struggled to say it, clarifying is better than pretending you understood.

5. Maintain normal eye contact. Wait patiently and naturally until the person is finished.

6. Should you ask someone questions about their stuttering? It's your call. Stuttering is not a taboo subject. If you have a question about stuttering, the person will probably appreciate your interest. Some people who stutter may be sensitive about their stuttering. However, if you are respectful and at ease, you may have a positive exchange.

7. Always remember that people who stutter are completely normal. Stuttering is a set of behaviors that interferes with the production of fluent speech. There are as many different patterns of stuttering as there are people who stutter.