

## ACCEPTANCE

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Acceptance is a frequently discussed concept by those affected by stuttering. Because it is an abstract, and often very personal concept, discussions can bring out strong emotions and opinions. Some have suggested that accepting one's stuttering is tantamount to "giving up" or "giving in," and thus deciding to remain locked in a world of fear and limited opportunity. Others have stated that acceptance means that it is not only "OK to stutter," but that stuttering could - and indeed should - be worn (or spoken) like a badge of honor. Still others believe that acceptance is a necessary first step for change to occur.

Through my own journey with stuttering, I have come to believe that acceptance is reaching a state of mind in which we acknowledge both to others - and more importantly to ourselves - that our challenge to speak with the spontaneity and fluidity of others is real but is not our (nor anyone else's) fault. While stuttering is part of who we are, it does not define or limit us.

The concept of acceptance does not mean that we are destined to remain at, or even be satisfied with the condition in which we find ourselves. It does mean, however, that we have reached a point where we can make clear decisions on our own behalf. These decisions are made without the baggage of the past holding us back, or the blind optimism of the future jading our expectations for "perfect" speech.

The decision to change the way we communicate requires personal risk and will be met with both success and challenges. However, with a foundation of acceptance, success is more sustainable, and challenges are less destructive.

Simply put, we cannot change the way we communicate for any appreciable period until we become comfortable with the idea that we are more than our stuttering, and that we *alone* have the power to determine how to navigate it. *Accepting stuttering does not mean giving up. It is not the end, but rather the beginning!*

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