

# A NEURODIVERSE VIEW OF STUTTERING

**Joseph Nicol, M.A., CCC-SLP**  
*Speech-Language Pathologist*  
TLC - The Treatment and Learning Centers



What comes to mind when you think of stuttering and what stuttering treatment might look like? Many people believe that the goal of speech-language therapy for people who stutter is to reduce the severity and frequency of speech interruptions to achieve smoother, more fluent speech. After all, most depictions of stuttering in movies and television show people who are nervous, shy, or even unintelligent. However, this is a false and harmful stereotype; stuttering is a neurodevelopmental difference that solely affects a person's speech, not their intellect or personality.



This is not to downplay the impact of stuttering on the way a person ultimately feels, thinks, and behaves. From a very young age, the negative social consequences endured by people who stutter – looks of confusion or disapproval, unsolicited advice about how to improve their speech, exclusion from conversations, etc. – lead individuals to spend an inordinate amount of time attempting to hide their stutter by avoiding certain sounds or words, social situations, or speaking altogether. Some types of therapy, such as fluency shaping or using delayed auditory feedback, may suppress stuttering in the short term, but lose their efficacy with age and often directly or indirectly perpetuate the negative feelings and thoughts associated with stuttering. Thus, the core issue of stuttering becomes not the interruption in speech, but the fear of stuttering and ensuing avoidance patterns that keep people who stutter from communicating in a natural, comfortable, and joyful way.



In line with our overall mission and therapeutic philosophy, fluency therapy at TLC is proudly focused on affirming that stuttering is a neurodevelopmental difference and not something that needs to be “fixed.” Our therapists help clients achieve comfortable, forward-moving speech that is natural for that individual, and collaborate on building a plan of care that meets their unique social, academic, and/or professional goals. Through increased awareness and representation in the media, improved education for caregivers and professionals, and a commitment to advocacy and allyship from the public, we can move toward a neurodiverse view of stuttering: a unique human difference to be accepted, valued, and celebrated as any other.