

## **Theories of The Cause of Stuttering**

### **A. Neurological Theory**

1. This theory states that there is an organic, neurological difference between stutterers and non- stutterers.
2. This difference is related to a lack of cerebral dominance resulting in a right brain, left brain problem. That is, for a person to have normal speech, one hemisphere or side of the brain (normally the left side) must control all aspects of speech. The stutterer appears to lack the dominance, therefore, his speech muscles do not receive well-integrated nerve impulses because both brain hemispheres are involved instead of only one, resulting in the initial stuttering blocks.
3. Some authorities feel that the change of handedness may adversely influence a child's dominance and be a factor in the cause of stuttering.
4. Recent research tends to demonstrate that some stutterers receive and process more speech on the right brain hemisphere than do nonstutterers.
5. The neurological theory of stuttering is gaining a great deal of popularity and is perhaps most widely held by experts. Recent research information tends to advance this theory.

### **B. Psychological Theory**

1. Those who support this theory feel that stuttering is a special type of emotional or psychological problem related to one's speech.
2. The cause of stuttering may be related to unhappy or traumatic experiences in childhood.
3. It is felt that stuttering is an outward expression of underlying emotional disturbances or problems.
4. Some feel that the stutterer is in an approach/avoidance conflict in which there is a drive to talk but a fear of talking. When these two drives are of equal strength, stuttering occurs.
5. Supporters of the psychological theory would feel that therapy oriented towards reduction and altering outward symptoms will be of little value as it is necessary to get to the cause with some type of counseling and/or psychotherapy.

### **C. Environmental Theory**

1. This theory states that stuttering is all learned behavior and that under certain adverse environmental conditions, many children could develop stuttering.
2. It is felt that when children become aware of normal repetitions and prolongations and attempt to avoid them, they become stutterers. Advocates of this theory feel that what the child does in an attempt to avoid normal repetitions and prolongations becomes the stuttering.

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## **Theories of The Cause of Stuttering (continued)**

3. It is felt that labeling the child a “stutterer” only increases the likelihood of the child becoming a stutterer.
4. Supporters of this theory point out that since stuttering is progressive it is likely learned.
5. Advocates of this theory point out that the various stuttering symptoms of word and situation fears, secondaries and self-image problems take years to develop; therefore, stuttering is learned and caused by the environment.

### **Summary**

The evidence at this time indicates that there is no single cause of stuttering. Stuttering, like many other human ills, probably has multiple causes even in the same person. It is also possible that in secondary stutterers the cause is no longer present but the problem is still there and self perpetuates. The stutterer should be less concerned about the cause of his stuttering as it can probably not be reversed. Instead, he should concentrate his energy on learning to successfully manage and live comfortably with his stuttering.

We do know that more and more research shows stuttering to be of neurological origins. A condition which impacts the whole person as stuttering does will have a psychological effect on that person. We do deal with these effects to some degree in the *Successful Stuttering Management Program*. We do know that secondaries are indeed learned behaviors and learning to greatly reduce or eliminate these behaviors is a large part of the program. Replacing these secondary behaviors with handling techniques is taught in Phase II of the *Successful Stuttering Management Program*.