

Covert Stuttering/Stammering

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Covert Stuttering Covert stuttering is the term assigned to define that kind of stuttering where a stutterer tries to hide, or mask his/her stutter. This type of stuttering usually stems from a number of factors. The first one relates to the time when he was a child. During this period he was subjected to ridicule, or just made to feel that his speech wasn't "normal", and in order to fit in the scheme of things he should speak normally. As such, the child thinks that if he stutters then he is doing something wrong, which is not normal, and is not accepted. The child tries hard to speak fluently, but when he cannot, he slips into hiding his stutter. This is where the covertness associated with stuttering comes into picture. There are various strategies that a covert stutterer employs to hide his stutter. The primary among this is, he out-waits his stutter silently. As such, his audience feels he is thinking. But, on the contrary, the covert stutterer knows very well what he has to say – he is just out-waiting his block to the time he feels it is safe to speak (without any stuttering). Another strategy employed is the use of filler or starters. (words like "ummm", or the usage of redundant words, like "I think". "I mean" etc) Covert stutters are also susceptible to a great deal of avoidance. They try to avoid any speaking situation where they feel their hidden secret might be unveiled. If there is no way around and they have to speak, then they would usually go around trying to avoid hard (feared) words, either by using synonyms they feel they are fluent on, or just by pre-ceding the feared words with irrelevant sentences or clauses. Another aspect that goes into the making of covert stutters is the severity of their stutter. A severe stutterer is not capable of masking his stutter. So, coverts are mostly persons whose stutter is either mild or moderate. Further, coverts don't usually display the outward manifestations of stuttering that overts do. May it be repetitions of initial syllable, or facial contortions – these are usually absent in coverts, and they are usually replaced by silent blocks, or filler words / sentences. The emotional aspect of stuttering is much denser in coverts than in overts. As coverts try to hide their stutter at any cost, any stuttering incident leaves larger footprints on their emotional wellbeing. As such coverts lie under constant fear, and are never really able to accept to and come to terms with their stuttering. This sometimes has limiting consequences on the recovery. The stigma associated with stuttering is also one of the reasons for their unwillingness to come out of their shell. Having said all that, for some people there isn't a sharp line dividing covert and overt behavior. An overt person on a good speech day, can very well function from the same mindset of a covert, just because he is better able to mask his stutter better. But, still, the essential differences do remain.