

# Matt's Story

**M**att began stuttering in January of 2005 at the age of 3 1/2. My husband and I ignored it at first. We thought it was just a developmental phase... We were told it was a developmental phase... he would surely grow out of it. For the next 17 months, Matt had weeks that his speech would be completely fluent. But, it seemed, as soon as we would breathe a sigh of relief, the stuttering would start again.

Matt had his 4 year old well-visit in April of 2005. We quizzed his pediatrician about his speech. We were told that stuttering was normal for a 4 year old. So we continued to ignore it. We have since learned the significant difference between normal disfluency and stuttering symptoms. With some 60 million stutters world-wide, isn't it a gross generalization to give a blanket "don't worry he'll outgrow it to all children?" Early intervention is suggested in so many childhood problems.

Matt started preschool in August. Shortly after school started, at a back-to-school picnic, his teacher approached my husband and me and said that she'd like to talk about us about Matt. She had noticed Matt's speech difficulties and suggested that he start speech therapy immediately. I almost cried that day (actually, I think I did). Not because there was a "problem" with my son at school, but because someone has FINALLY validated that Matt's speech was something that was not going to go away on its own.

So we began speech therapy with a woman who really must be the sweetest, calmest, nicest person in the world. She met with Matt at school twice a week during the whole school year. My husband or I came to observe several speech therapy sessions. Basically, they consisted of describing picture cards and playing games. Really, the goal in therapy was to limit Matt's speech so that the words he spoke were completely fluent. Thus, we were told, his brain would be "trained" to imitate this fluent speech during everyday situations.

Some exercises we were told to try with Matt at home included:

- Always speak very slowly and calmly when we talked to him
- Only ask him questions that required one or two word answers
- Cue him with his sentences, for example, "For lunch today you had..."
- If he was stuttering severely, interrupt him by saying, "Hold on a second Matt. You said that you were running on the playground with the ball. And then you..."

Perhaps the most troubling advice we received was to take an entire weekend and not speak to him unless he initiated the conversation. Citing the abrupt communicative isolation, he asked us if we were mad at him.

Matt is an intelligent boy. As we worked with him using these techniques I felt his self confidence deteriorate. It broke my heart. Plus, we were still experiencing the same fluent/non-fluent speech cycle. My husband and I were at a loss for what to do. Matt was quickly approaching kindergarten and the teasing wasn't too far behind.

As I mentioned, we continued with this therapy for about 9 months. And, looking back, I feel like it gave us the same results as doing nothing.

Fortunately, two separate events, happening about a week apart, led our family to Tim Mackesey. First, our speech therapist recommended that Matt see a stuttering specialist over the summer.

She recommended Tim. Next, during Matt's 5 year old well-visit, his pediatrician said that she had a patient who had a lot of success working with Tim. I knew something had to change, so I called Tim to talk about his therapy approach.

To be honest, after I talked to Tim on the phone, I was scared. Tim believes in putting the child in charge of "catching" words that come out "bumpy." We had NEVER discussed stuttering with Matt. I was terrified that doing this would take away the last bit of confidence he had left.

At the same time, however, I knew that things couldn't go on as they were. So we took a leap of faith and started speech therapy with Tim.

I will never forget the smile on Matt's face the first time he self corrected his speech. It looked like the equivalent of telling him that Spiderman was coming to his house or we were having chocolate cake for dinner that night (pretty cool things for a 5 year old!) We had empowered him to take control. We had taught him that there was a solution to his bumpy words that he could implement all by himself (and with a little coaching from Mom and Dad).

A couple weeks into therapy, we went on vacation. And my husband and I spent our time waiting in hour-long lines for theme park rides listening to Matt catch and fix those "bumpy" words... every time with a huge smile on his face. Needless to say, I think we were the only parents in the park who didn't mind the wait.

Thank you, Tim, for giving us the tools to coach Matt through his "bumpy" speech. You have made an incredible impact on his future. You have given him confidence; you have insured his success in school. You have given him school plays, you have given him joy on the playground, and you have given him friendships. And above all, you have taught him at a young age that he has control over what happens to him in his life. Thank you for that, above all.