

You Can Help Children Who Stutter

How can teachers handle teasing?

Bullying is a part of everyday life for many kids, and it is a problem that is not easily fixed. Still, we can help children who stutter learn strategies for dealing with bullying on their own.

The goal of these strategies is to help the child respond in a way that will minimize future bullying experiences, while supporting the child's self-esteem and self-confidence. For example...

- Establish a classroom atmosphere that fosters a tolerance for differences among all children (not just children who stutter).
- Handle teasing or bullying about stuttering in the same matter-of-fact, positive way that you handle any bullying episodes.
- Discuss teasing episodes discreetly, and don't forget to ask the child who stutters what he needs from you.
- Ask your school SLP to get the NSA's booklet on bullying and children who stutter!

What about classroom situations?

Classroom tasks are among the most challenging for children who stutter. Here are some ideas from other teachers that can help you help the children in your classroom.

- During classroom discussions, allow extra time for children to respond, and encourage everyone to contribute their ideas.
- Recall that reading out loud in class may increase a child's anxiety as she waits for her turn. After talking with the child about what would work best for her, consider selecting readers at random, or using some other strategy, rather than going "down the row."
- In group work, monitor the children's collaboration to make sure the child who stutters has the chance to participate in class activities.
- Remember that time pressure makes it harder for children to speak. When asking questions, try not to reward only the fastest responses.

- Help students learn to take turns and allow time for thinking and responding.
- Oral reports may be particularly difficult for some children. Work with the child to develop a plan that meets his individual needs. Flexibility may be needed, but it is important to provide opportunities for the child to be a successful contributor in class.

Here are some additional suggestions for speaking with children who stutter:

1. Finishing sentences and filling in words are not generally helpful. Even though you may be trying to help, this can put even more pressure on the person who stutters.
2. Maintain normal eye contact and do not seem impatient, embarrassed, or alarmed. Just wait patiently until the person is finished speaking. Be a good listener.
3. Don't give advice such as; "Slow down," "Take a breath," or "Relax." These are simplistic responses to a complex problem.
4. Let the person know, by your manner and actions, that you are listening to what he is saying, not how he is saying it.



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Teachers and parents:

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The National Stuttering Association is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Since 1977, we have dedicated ourselves to providing hope, dignity, support, education, and empowerment to children and adults who stutter, their families, and the professional community.

The School-Age Child Who Stutters: Information for Educators

Answers to Teachers' Frequently Asked Questions about how to help children who stutter



Teachers are one of the most important parts of a child's environment.

For children who stutter, a teacher's understanding and support can have a major impact on the child's experience of stuttering.

This brochure will help you understand stuttering--and children who stutter—so you can help children in your classroom communicate successfully and effectively.



What Teachers Need To Know To Help Children Who Stutter

What is stuttering?

Stuttering can be described in many ways, and many definitions have been offered by speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and scientists. Put simply, stuttering is a communication disorder involving disruptions, or *disfluencies*, in the flow of speech. Stuttering involves more than just the production of disfluencies, however. Stuttering can also have a significant impact on a child's ability to communicate in key settings, including the classroom. This can lead to low self-esteem and reduced self-confidence, as well as difficulties participating in activities that involve communication.

What does the child feel?

Just as every child is different, every child who stutters is different. Many children experience negative consequences because of stuttering, though some do not. As you know, children just want to be like their peers, and stuttering makes it hard for them to do that. Children's communication difficulties can contribute to feelings of insecurity, frustration, or shame.

Children also react to the expectations of parents, teachers, and others who want them to speak fluently. Avoidance of speaking situations, words, or sounds can result from the child's desire to meet these expectations. Many children will go to great lengths to hide their stuttering and prevent their private struggle from becoming a public one.

What is known about stuttering?

The causes of stuttering are complex. Theories indicate that stuttering is due to *many* aspects of the child's development. We know that stuttering is **not** caused by psychological or physical trauma. Thus, it is not an emotional disorder.

We also know that stuttering is not linked to intelligence. Children who stutter do not have higher or lower intelligence just because they stutter.

Approximately 1% of the population stutters. Current estimates put the total number of people who stutter in the U.S. at about 3 million.

Stuttering is a highly variable disorder. Children stutter more in some situations, and less in others situations. It is often hard to figure out what causes the changes from situation to situation. This variability adds to the mystery surrounding stuttering and makes it harder for the child to know how to deal with his speaking difficulties.

Many children exhibit early signs of stuttering in the preschool years, though most outgrow it. Unfortunately, we cannot predict which children will develop normal fluency and which will continue to stutter. Early assessment, diagnosis, and treatment are critical for ensuring the child's long-term communication success.

What about speech therapy?

Speech therapy can help children who stutter communicate more easily and more effectively. Unfortunately, there are no instant cures, and "quick fixes" usually do not last for long.

Successful therapy involves a process of change over time, in which children learn to manage speech and make positive changes for the long term. Therapy is not easy, for the child or clinician, but it **can** make a difference.

What are the goals of therapy?

For the child who already has an established pattern of stuttering, the goal of therapy is not simply to make the child fluent. Of course, improved fluency is important; however, it is only part of the process. Therapy also helps to prevent negative emotions or avoidance behaviors from becoming part of the child's stuttering. This means that even when a child cannot speak fluently, he can still speak freely and say what he wants to say. Thus, the overall goal of therapy is effective communication in the classroom and elsewhere.

Successful therapy fulfills two important roles in the child's life: it increases speech management skills and it creates positive beliefs and feelings about speech, stuttering, and self.

How Teachers Can Help Children Who Stutter

All children are unique, so different children have different needs from their therapists and teachers. The most important thing you can do is *listen to the child* to learn about his needs.

Situations you may see include: a child who has been bullied, a child who is reluctant to express feelings about stuttering, a child who is embarrassed about speaking, and a child who does not participate in classroom activities (reading aloud or giving reports) because of a fear of stuttering. All of these situations, and many others, are faced by children who stutter. The good news is that teachers can help.

First, remember that *you* define the communication environment in your classroom. Through your own model, you can establish the patterns that other children will follow when reacting to children who stutter.

Second, know that there are many ways you can provide a supportive communication environment for children who stutter. For example:

- Minimize interruptions of children's speech and model an easy, relaxed speaking style.
- Exhibit a positive, accepting attitude about different communication styles and abilities.
- Act as a liaison between therapy and the classroom; you can aid in therapy progress.
- Be a source of understanding and support. You are in a unique position to help the child who stutters accept himself.
- Be aware of the messages you (and your students) send. Help everyone understand the importance of acceptance.
- Work together with parents, speech-language pathologists, and others to support the child, both in and out of the classroom.

By implementing these and other strategies, you can help the child who stutters learn that it is okay to stutter and that you support him. This will help him succeed in your classroom!