



How parents and teachers can help children who stutter

This handout highlights some of the most significant aspects to be considered in consultation between SLPs, parents and teachers. The list is not exhaustive and is not intended to replace an assessment and discussion of each student's unique and individual needs. The consultation of a speech-language pathologist is required to clarify, expand and individualize each item listed here.

It helps to...

Speak slowly, pause and wait.

Prolong your sounds and words and pause more frequently. This may be difficult to do all the time but try speaking more slowly for at least several short periods per day. With a calm, slow speech model children tend to speak more slowly and smoothly. Also, wait for a second or two before responding to the child. This slows the pace of conversation and gives the child time to add something else without feeling rushed.

It helps to...

Be a relaxed and attentive listener.

Listeners may experience anxiety, sympathy or impatience when listening to children who stutter, however, by looking away or otherwise showing your emotions you are signaling your discomfort to the child. Show the child that you are interested in *what* is being said, not *how* it is being said.

It helps to...

Speak openly about stuttering if the child is aware.

If the child has become aware of the stuttering we should be accepting and supportive, letting the child know that we understand. "Sometimes it's really hard to get words out." With younger students, use terms such as "bumpy speech" or "choppy speech", which are more meaningful to children than stuttering.

It helps to...

Establish rules for turn-taking

In family and group situations with other children, encourage everyone to wait quietly and listen while others are talking – don't allow interruptions.

It helps to...

Create a relaxed, unhurried environment.

Try to reduce activities that may cause tension, excitement or stress as these may "trigger" increased stuttering. When children are upset, overtired or excited, encourage quiet activities so they can relax and not feel pressured to talk.

It helps to...

Encourage communication especially on good days.

Encourage your child to communicate; don't let stuttering stop you from engaging your child in speaking and listening. Some children avoid talking because they are afraid they will stutter. All children need to be encouraged to engage in communication.

If the child is having a day with very little stuttering, encourage as much talking as possible. If the child is having a particularly bad day or is experiencing frustration, don't demand a lot of talking by concentrate on non-verbal activities such as playing sports or going for a walk.



It helps to...	AVOID interrupting, filling in words or finishing what the child is saying.	Interrupting creates a time pressure and can be very frustrating. Filling in words signals an unwillingness to wait and implies the child cannot finish the word or phrase alone.
It helps to...	AVOID giving advice like "Slow down," or "Stop and start over," or "Think before you speak."	Although this advice is well meant, it is seldom useful and can often increase tension which can in turn increase stuttering.
It helps to...	BE AWARE that frequent questioning can affect fluency.	Direct questions demand an answer and can create pressure to communicate. Where possible, try replacing questions with comments. If the student is interested, a response will probably come spontaneously. For example: replace "What are you doing?" with "That looks like fun."
It helps to...	AVOID drawing attention to stuttering if the child is unaware.	If children are not aware of their stuttering it is important not to draw attention to it or give the impression that you are concerned. Do not discuss the speech problem in their presence.
It helps to...	PREVENT teasing	Don't allow other children to mimic or tease. Encourage an understanding attitude from others by explaining the nature of stuttering. With young children, explain that stuttering is a nuisance to the child and that teasing makes it worse. Enlist their help where possible. Older students may benefit from a discussion about stuttering and respecting individual differences.
It helps to...	BE AWARE that "demand speech" can affect fluency.	Directing a child to speak can create pressure that can make speaking more difficult. For young children, try to model what you want the child to say. Never force a child to put on a speaking "performance".