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Limiting Verbal Interruptions

Children who stutter often produce more disfluencies when they are interrupted **or** when they interrupt others. The reasons for this are not well-understood; however, it seems that there the child experiences greater demands on his or her speech and language system during interruptions, and this increased demand may be enough to disrupt a child's fluency. Therefore, for young children who stutter, it is important to limit interruptions from others when the child is speaking, as well as the number of times that the child interrupts others.

Unfortunately, limiting interruptions for a young child is not always easy. It can be especially hard when siblings are involved and competition for talking time grows. Rather than simply telling children "Don't talk when your brother is talking," it can be helpful to encourage proper turn-taking with some tangible reward. Children often adjust to rules more quickly when there is "something in it for them." This could be anything from a sticker to a small toy given at the end of the week.

To reinforce turn-taking, we suggest using a chart that allows you to keep track of turn-taking for your family. For example, a family with two parents and three children may use the following chart.

Name	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
Parent 1							
Parent 2							
Child 1							
Child 2							
Child 3							

You can establish rules such as: "You can't talk when someone else is talking. When it is your turn to talk, everyone will listen and let you finish." Using the chart, you can then place an "X" in the box when one person interrupts another – you can also use a checkmark or happy face when somebody does a good job of waiting their turn. Make the chart big and place it where everyone can see it on a consistent basis. You can begin by giving a reward to the winner (whoever has the least number of Xs or most happy faces) on a daily basis, then move to providing a reward on a weekly basis after the game has been established and everyone understands the rules. You can also pick a block of time each day to focus on tracking the interruptions and using the chart. It will not be possible for you to track this all the time. Remember, it is important to track the interruptions of everyone--not just the child who is stuttering.

Keeping track of interruptions while talking will help you to become more aware of the time pressures your child may be experiencing (or perceiving) during daily communication. Many times, we find that simply drawing attention to the interruptions is sufficient to reduce them. If necessary, you can also work with your clinician to identify strategies for reducing interruptions further. Above all, be patient with yourself and with your child. These changes take time, and they are not easy to do, but with practice you can help yourself and the people in your child's environment limit interruptions, reduce time pressures, and ultimately, communicate more easily.