



A partnership between the Department of Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC and the Department of Communication Science and Disorders at the University of Pittsburgh

## ***Stuttering Center of Western Pennsylvania***

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## **STUTTERING AT A GLANCE: Information for Teachers**

### **STUTTERING FACTS**

**There is no *single* cause of stuttering.** Current research indicates that many different factors, including genetic inheritance, the child's language skills, the child's ability to move his or her mouth when speaking, the child's temperament, and the reactions of those in the child's environment all play a role in the development of stuttering.

**Stuttering is NOT an emotional problem. It is NOT caused by anxiety or nervousness.** Stuttering can cause children to be fearful when speaking, but this is not the cause of the disorder.

**Stuttering is a speech/language impairment characterized by disruptions in the forward flow of speech** (or "speech disfluencies"), such as repetitions of whole words or parts of words, prolongations of sounds, or complete blockages of sound. Speech disfluencies may be accompanied by physical tension or struggle.

**Stuttering is highly variable** – sometimes a child will stutter a lot and sometimes the child will be very fluent. Do not be surprised if the child is completely fluent in your classroom! Stuttering tends to come and go, and sometimes, teachers never even hear a child stutter even though the child may stutter noticeably at home and in other settings.

**Many children experience fear or embarrassment because of their stuttering.** As a result, they may try to *hide* stuttering so it is not visible to others. They do this by avoiding speaking in certain situations or to certain people. They might also avoid saying words they think they might stutter on—or, they may refrain from talking altogether. If a child avoids speaking, the disorder can have a marked impact on social, emotional, and educational development.

**Some children become so good at hiding stuttering that others may not even know they stutter –this is not a good thing!** Although hiding stuttering might sound like a good goal, it is not. Hiding takes a lot of emotional and cognitive effort and results in shame for the speaker. This, in turn, often limits the child's ability to participate in life activities at school or in social settings. The best way to deal with stuttering is not to try to hide it or hide from it, but rather to face it directly.

### **STUTTERING TREATMENT**

**For very young children (age 2½ to 5 or 6), the goal of treatment is to help the child speak fluently.** We do this by teaching changes the timing and the tension of speech production through modeling and play-based activities, both in therapy and at home. Treatment for young children can be highly effective, with many children exhibiting complete recovery by approximately age 6 or 7.

**For older children, it is more difficult to eliminate stuttering** and the child is more likely to experience shame and embarrassment that characterize advanced stuttering. Improving fluency is still a focus of treatment; however, an additional goal involves helping children develop healthy, positive attitudes toward themselves and their speech, even if they still stutter. Parents, teachers, and others play a central role in this process by conveying acceptance of the child's speech and by providing a supportive environment where the child can stutter *and* learn to speak more fluently.

## **SPEAKING IN CLASS**

**Speaking in front of the class can cause significant anxiety for children who stutter.**

Fortunately, there are several strategies you can use that can make it easier for the child to succeed in your classroom. Here are a few examples:

- When having the class read aloud, try to avoid going down the rows in a set order. A more random style of turn taking may help minimize the anxiety associated with this difficult speaking situation.
- Encourage turn-taking for the entire class. Limit verbal interruptions and try to not reward quick call-out answers in class.
- Be patient. Allow plenty of time for the child who stutters to talk and answer questions. Remember that you set the tone for how the rest of the class will respond to the child's stuttering.
- Wait a brief period of 1-2 seconds before answering question to show the children that there is not a lot of pressure to answer the question immediately.
- Treat the child who stutters no different than the other children in class. Most children who stutter want to be like their friends, and if they are singled out because of stuttering this can contribute to the sense of stigma and isolation they may feel.

## **TEASING AND BULLYING**

Bullying may occur when a child exhibits a characteristic that is different from other children. Stuttering creates a noticeable difference in the way a child communicates, so it can be an easy target for bullies. You can work with the child, his family, and the child's speech-language pathologist to come up with the best plan for handling teasing, but here are some suggestions:

- Educate the class about stuttering. Have a Stuttering Awareness Day so that other children can learn about it and be more comfortable with it.
- Use stuttering as well as other examples of differences that children may have as part of an open discussion about individual differences. This can help minimize bullying for all children in your class.
- Encourage the child to tell you, or other adults, how bullying makes them feel. This can help the child discuss their emotions and not have built-up hostility.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

There is a wealth of information available to help children who stutter, parents, administrators, and teachers. The **Stuttering Center of Western Pennsylvania** provides information on our website ([www.StutteringCenter.org](http://www.StutteringCenter.org)) that can help you and your student's family work together to improve the child's ability to communicate and to succeed in life.

There are several other organizations dedicated to stuttering. For example, the **Stuttering Foundation of America** (SFA; [www.StutteringHelp.org](http://www.StutteringHelp.org)) produces many valuable materials to improve the treatment of children who stutter. The **National Stuttering Association** (NSA; [www.WeStutter.org](http://www.WeStutter.org)), a nationwide support group for people who stutter, their families, and the individuals who work with them. Your contact at the Stuttering Center will help you get in touch with these and other organizations.

For specific questions, contact Dr. J. Scott Yaruss, Co-Director of the Stuttering Center of Western Pennsylvania at (412) 383-6538 or [jsyaruss@pitt.edu](mailto:jsyaruss@pitt.edu).