

Teachers often report difficulty in knowing how to best help a child who stutters in the classroom. For example...



- Should he be expected to give oral reports, read aloud, or answer questions?
- Should you talk to him about his speech or ignore it?
- What should you do if other children tease her?

These are only a few of the questions often asked by teachers.

The preschool and kindergarten child

All children in this age group are busily learning to talk. As such, they make speech mistakes. We call these “mistakes” disfluencies. Some children have more than others, and this is normal. There are certain children, however, who have many disfluencies—particularly repetition and prolongation of sounds. These are quite noticeable to listeners.

If you are concerned that there may be a problem of stuttering developing with one of these children, don’t pay any special attention to the child at this point. Rather, talk to a speech pathologist for suggestions.

Also, talk to the parents about their opinion of the problem so that you know whether this is typical speech behavior for him. In most instances, if parents, teachers, and others listen to and answer the child in a patient, calm, and unemotional way, the child’s speech returns to normal as his language abilities and his adjustments to school improve. If the child continues to have disfluencies, however, you may want to ask a speech pathologist to observe him.

The elementary school child

There are children in this age group who not only repeat and prolong sounds markedly, but also struggle and become tense and frustrated in their efforts to talk. They need help. Without it, their stuttering will probably adversely affect their classroom performance. As suggested with the preschool child, consult with a speech pathologist as well as with the parents and discuss your observations with them. If you, the parents, and the speech pathologist agree that this child’s disfluencies are different from other children in your classroom, you may decide as a team to evaluate the child for stuttering.

A major concern for most teachers is the child’s reactions to his stuttering in the classroom. How should the child be expected to participate in class? The answer to this question depends on the individual child. At one extreme is the child who may be quite unconcerned and happy to participate like any other child; at the other extreme the child who will cry and refuse to talk. Most are somewhere in between. If the child is being seen by a speech pathologist, find out her opinion about reasonable expectations. Also, ask the child how he would like to participate. Sometimes participation requirements become part of the child’s IEP.

Talk with the child: show your support

Usually it is advisable for you to talk with the child privately. Explain to him that when talking—just like when learning other skills—we sometimes bobble or repeat or get tangled up on words. With practice we improve. Explain that you are his teacher and that his stuttering is okay with you.

By talking to the child in this way, you help him learn that you are aware of his stuttering and that you accept it—and him.

Answering questions

As you are asking questions in the classroom, you can do certain things to make it easier for a child who stutters.

- Initially, until he adjusts to the class, ask him questions that can be answered with relatively few words.
- If every child is going to be asked a question, find out if the child who stutters prefers to be called on early or later. Tension and worry can build up in some children when they have to wait their turn, or in others when they know they have to answer sooner than other children. It’s important to ask each child.
- Assure the whole class that (1) they will have as much time as they need to answer questions, and (2) you are interested in having them take time and think through their answers, not just answering quickly.

Reading aloud in class

Many children who stutter are able to handle oral reading tasks in the classroom satisfactorily, particularly if they are encouraged to practice at home. There will be some, however, who will stutter severely while reading aloud in class. The following suggestions may help these children.

Most children who stutter are fluent when reading in unison with someone else. Rather than not calling on the child who stutters, let him have his turn with one of the other children. Let the whole class read in pairs sometimes so that the child who stutters doesn’t feel “special.” Gradually he may become more confident and be able to manage reading aloud on his own.

Teasing

Teasing can be very painful for the student who stutters, and it should be eliminated as far as possible.

- If the child has obviously been upset by teasing, talk with him or her one-on-one. Help the child to understand why others tease, and brainstorm ideas for how to respond.
- If any certain children are picking on him, talk to them alone and explain that teasing is unacceptable.
- Try to enlist their help. Most want the approval of the teacher.
- If the problem persists, you may want to consult a guidance counselor or social worker if one is available in your building. They often have good suggestions for managing teasing.

Speech therapy

If you are unsure whether a speech pathologist is available in your school, talk with your building administrator. Also, suggest to the parents that they seek out one who specializes in stuttering. The Stuttering Foundation offers free referrals at StutteringHelp.org and tartamudez.org or call toll-free 800-992-9392.



We have listed a few general points here. Always keep in mind that each child is different, and your caring positive attitude will make a big difference.

Illustrated by Amy L. Dech

The material in this brochure was originally compiled by Dean E. Williams, Ph.D., and updated in 2013 by Lisa A. Scott, Ph.D., The Florida State University.

8 tips for teachers

1 Don't tell the student to "slow down" or "just relax."



2 Don't complete words for the student or talk for him or her.

3 Help all members of the class learn to take turns talking and listening. All students — and especially those who stutter — find it much easier to talk when there are few interruptions and they have the listener's attention.

4 Expect the same quality and quantity of work from the student who stutters as the one who doesn't.

5 Speak with the student in an unhurried way, pausing frequently.

6 Convey that you are listening to the content of the message, not how it is said.

7 Have a one-on-one conversation with the student who stutters about needed accommodations in the classroom. Respect the student's needs, but do not be enabling.

8 Don't make stuttering something to be ashamed of. Talk about stuttering just like any other matter.

Compiled by Lisa A. Scott, Ph.D., The Florida State University

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*Some of the professionals who authored these materials: Edward G. Conture, Ph.D., Vanderbilt University; Richard F. Curlee, Ph.D., University of Arizona; Carl Dell, Jr., Ph.D., Eastern Illinois University; Jane Fraser, The Stuttering Foundation; Hugo H. Gregory, Ph.D., Northwestern University; Barry Guitar, Ph.D., University of Vermont; Diane Hill, M.A., Northwestern University; Peter Ramig, Ph.D., University of Colorado-Boulder; Lisa Scott, Ph.D., The Florida State University; C. Woodruff Starkweather, Ph.D., Temple University; and Patricia Zebrowski, Ph.D., University of Iowa.



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P.O. Box 11749 • Memphis, TN 38111-0749

info@StutteringHelp.org

800-992-9392

www.StutteringHelp.org www.tartamudez.org



Illustrated by Amy L. Dech

The Child Who
Stutters at School:

Notes to the Teacher



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