

## *Discuss the problem*

- If you have a student who you think has a stuttering problem, discuss the problem with his parent(s) and your school's speech-language pathologist. Then refer the child for a speech assessment.
- If the child wants to talk to you, talk with him in private about his speech difficulties. Tell the child that you are aware of his stuttering and you accept him as he is. If the child is receiving therapy for his stuttering, you might want to talk about ways you can help him with his speech.
- If the child is not aware of his problem, use terms such as "difficult speech," "bumpy speech" or "getting stuck" to describe the problem. Avoid the label "stutterer."

## *Reduce language demands*

### ***Talk slower***

- When you talk to a child at a slower rate, the child knows that you are not rushed and that you will not rush him to talk.
- Providing a model of slower speech works much better than saying, "slow down." Children who stutter are often frustrated by interruptions when they try to communicate. A child who is repeatedly told to "slow down" may simply decide to talk less.

### ***Be a good listener***

- Focus on "what" the child is saying rather than on "how" the child is talking.
- Listen with interest and do not interrupt.
- Lean slightly forward.
- Smile to let the child know you heard what was said.
- Look the child in the eyes, be attentive and wait patiently.
- Occasionally reassure the child by saying, "Sometimes I have trouble talking too" or "That was a tough word."

### ***Be a good communicator***

- Pause when talking to give the child an opportunity to talk.
- Use shorter sentences and simpler words when the child is having a bad day with dysfluent speech (e.g. "I'm going to the store," is simpler than, "I'm going down to West Edmonton Mall to do some window shopping"). When you use simple language the child is more likely to use simple language when he talks.
- Make more comments and ask less questions when the child is having a bad day with dysfluent speech. When you must ask a question, ask questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no" or that need only short answers.
- Paraphrase (say in different words) what the child has said.
- Never pretend that you have understood what the child has said if you have not understood. Be honest and say, "I was not listening carefully enough. Please repeat what you wanted to tell me" or "I did not understand you. Can you tell me again?"

## *Reduce situational demands*

### ***Notice when the child is having problems and try to help***

- Reduce unnecessary hurry by setting regular routines for the child.
- All children have good and bad days. Children who stutter may have more problems when they are tired, sick or stressed. When a child has a bad day, reduce the number of times that he needs to speak or read aloud. On good days, give the child more opportunities to talk.

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### ***Reduce tension in the classroom***

- Avoid situations where you argue, criticize, scold, punish or get angry with the child.
- Reduce your own anxiety about the child's stuttering. Children often know when people feel uncomfortable with them.

### ***Reduce competition to speak***

- Give the child many opportunities to talk.
- Listen with interest when the child talks.
- Encourage students to take turns in classroom discussions.

### ***Help the child to become more confident***

- Help the child set achievable goals. Do not set standards which are too high or too low.
- Let the child know that you accept him.
- Support the child when he talks during classroom activities. Recognize the child for what he says rather than for how he says it.
- Give the child the same responsibilities that you give to other students and involve the child in all classroom activities. Avoidance or special treatment isolate the child and reinforce negative speech habits.
- The child may feel anxious or fearful about classroom presentations, oral reports, reading aloud or answering questions. You can help the child feel more comfortable by:
  - Allowing students to practice oral presentations, reading aloud or answering questions in easier situations (such as in front of you, their families or their friends) before moving to more difficult situations (such as in front of a small group of students and then, finally, in front of the whole class).
  - Allowing students who are anxious about speaking or reading aloud to talk in unison.
- Children who stutter often worry about stuttering while they are waiting for their turn to speak. The longer the child has to wait to talk, the more anxious he will feel. Try to call on the student who stutters early in the discussion or try asking students questions randomly rather than in a set order (such as questioning down a row).

### ***Reduce situations that put time pressure on the child***

- Time pressures make it more difficult to talk smoothly.
- Be patient when you talk to the child. The child will feel pressured when you change the subject quickly or interrupt him frequently when he is talking.

## ***Responses that do NOT help***

Unhelpful responses focus on “how” a child is talking rather than on “what” the child is saying.

Do not:

- Finish a word or sentence for the child.
- Interrupt the child.
- Tell the child to stop and say the word again.
- Tell the child to slow down.
- Force the child to speak in front of others or expect the child to use language beyond his abilities.

## ***Dealing with teasing***

Children often tease a child who stutters. Deal with teasing tactfully.

You might want to organize an activity on “tolerating individual differences” to help other students learn that each individual has his or her own strengths and weaknesses and that no one is perfect. During these discussions, ask students to talk about their strengths and weaknesses with their classmates. The child who stutters might take this opportunity to talk about his stuttering. Do not discuss stuttering in the classroom without the permission of the child who stutters and, if appropriate, the child's parents.

***For more information, contact your community speech-language pathologist.***