



A Teacher's Guide to Stuttering *for teenagers 12 to 18 years*

What is stuttering?

Stuttering is a motor speech problem that is not a normal part of a child's development. This means that stuttering is **NOT** caused by:

- bad parenting
- anxiety
- low intelligence or IQ

The exact cause of stuttering is unknown. There is a genetic link in some cases.

The ratio of boys to girls is 3:1 and this disproportion increases with age.

Most school aged children (up to 82%) are teased about their stuttering.

Stuttering behaviours include:

- Repetition - of sounds (c-c-c-cat), syllables (ca-ca-ca-cat), words (cat-cat-cat-cat) or phrases (the cat, the cat, the cat jumped).
- Prolongation - of sounds (e.g. m → y).
- Inappropriate pauses - between sounds or words.
- Blocking - getting stuck on sounds and nothing comes out.

Body and facial movements may accompany these stuttering behaviours.

Treatment

Early intervention by a Speech Pathologist can help prevent stuttering behaviours from increasing in severity and interfering with a child's social and emotional development and general well-being.

Stuttering can be treated at other stages of the life-span but often with longer treatment times and more complex treatments than for preschool children.

Smooth Speech programs have the best evidence for treatment outcomes for stuttering in teenagers and adults.

How can teachers help?

Some students try to hide their stutter by putting on a voice, using filler words such as 'like' and 'but', being a class clown and saying 'I don't know' when they know the answer because they fear they will stutter on the correct answer.

Reduce time pressures and minimize stress:

- Speak more slowly to convey that there is plenty of time and ensure the atmosphere is relaxed.
- Listen attentively, maintain eye contact and use relaxed body language.
- Do not suggest the student 'take a deep breath'. Although you mean well, this suggestion rarely helps.

- Do not finish your student's sentences as this tends to make fluency worse and will reduce self-confidence.
- Call on the student early when there is a task that requires the class to speak out loud so there is less time for fear to build.
- Talk openly with your student about their stuttering.

Promote participation in classroom activities:

- In private, ask the student which classroom activities they find most easy or difficult.
- Do not excuse them from classroom speaking requirements.
- On a non-fluent day, reduce the amount of speaking aloud situations. Ask yes/no questions to increase participation and reducing speaking demands or use choice questions, e.g. 'Are you in group A or group B for sport today?'
- On a fluent day extend your student's opportunities to speak.
- Allow the student to practise oral presentations in an easy situation first, e.g. at home in front of a parent, then build up to a more difficult situation, and finally give the presentation to the class. This is a more inclusive approach than the suggestion below.
- If the student feels anxiety and fear of giving the oral presentation, allow them to deliver it to a smaller group.

Educate the class about individual differences and teasing and bullying:

- 82% of school aged children are teased about their stutter.
- Talk in general about everyone being different.
- Run some class activities covering teasing and bullying in general.
- Encourage all students to take turns and reinforce good talking rules such as: look at the person who is talking, listen and think about what the person is saying and wait until the person is finished before you speak.
- Reduce teasing and bullying by cultivating acceptance of the student's speech from their peers.
- Discuss some strategies with your students about teasing or bullying.

Keep parents and/or the Speech Pathologist aware of any changes in the student's speech patterns or avoidance behaviours throughout the year.

A Teacher's Guide to Stuttering *for teenagers 12 to 18 years*