

Stuttering



Stuttering, also known as stammering or dysfluency, is a disruption in the normal flow of speech. The term “stuttering” covers a wide spectrum of severity: it may include individuals with barely perceptible difficulties, for whom the condition is largely cosmetic, as well as others with extremely severe symptoms, for whom the problem prevents most oral communication. It is characterized by involuntary sound repetition, the prolongation of certain sounds, syllables or words, or the abnormal hesitation or pausing before speech (referred to as blocks). Individuals who stutter may avoid certain words and substitute others. The impact of stuttering on a person’s functioning and emotional state can include fears of having to enunciate specific vowels or consonants, fears of being caught stuttering in social situations, self-imposed isolation, anxiety, stress, shame or a feeling of “loss of control” during speech.

Implications for Planning and Awareness

- Meet with the student and parents early in the school year to discuss how the school can support this student’s needs related to stuttering. This could include finding out about:
 - typical triggers that need to be considered at school
 - successful strategies used at home that also could be used in your classroom.
- Collaborate with the parents and student to consider if, and how, they would like to share specific information on stuttering with peers. If they wish to do so, consultation with a specialist, such as a speech-language pathologist, may be helpful.
- Collaborate with the school and/or jurisdictional team to identify and coordinate any needed consultation and supports (e.g., speech therapy).
- Learn as much as you can about how stuttering may affect learning and social and emotional well-being. Reading, asking questions and talking to qualified professionals will build your understanding and help inform decisions to support the student’s success at school.

Your awareness needs to begin with conversations with the student’s parents.

Implications for Instruction

- Provide a model of slower speech. This works much better than saying, “slow down.” A student who is repeatedly told to “slow down” may simply decide to talk less.
- Listen with interest (e.g., look the student in the eyes, be attentive and wait patiently). Listen to *what* a student is saying, not *how* he or she is saying it.
- Demonstrate respectful listening by *not* interrupting, finishing sentences, filling in words, or giving simplistic advice (e.g., relax, slow down, take a breath).



- Pause when talking to give the student an opportunity to talk.
- Paraphrase what students say so they know that they are understood.
- Be honest if you have not understood what the student has said (e.g., “I was not listening carefully enough. Please repeat what you told me.” or “I did not understand you. Can you tell me again?”).
- Reduce unnecessary hurrying by setting regular routines for the student.
- Reduce the number of times the student needs to speak or read aloud when he or she is tired, sick or stressed).
- Make more comments and ask less open-ended questions when the student is having a bad day (e.g., “I like the colours you used in your painting.” rather than “What can you tell me about your drawing?”).
- Give the student the same responsibilities that you give to other students and involve them in all classroom activities.
- Allow students to practise speaking assignments (e.g., oral presentations, reading aloud, answering questions) in easier situations (e.g., in front of you, family or a friend) before moving to more challenging situations (e.g., in front of the class, a school performance).
- Allow students who are anxious about speaking or reading aloud to talk in unison.
- Reduce situations that put time pressure on the student as this makes it more difficult to talk smoothly.
- When it is time for answering questions, discourage call-out answers and model thinking time.
- During group activities, pair the student who stutters with easy-going, patient partners who allow him or her to contribute equally.

Implications for Social and Emotional Well-being

- Engage the student and parents in planning for transitions between grade levels and different schools.
- Observe and report situations that seem to promote fluency and reduce stuttering in the student.
- Support the development of the student’s self-advocacy skills so the student understands his or her “triggers” (e.g., stress, lack of sleep, oral presentations), and understands what strategies or supports are helpful (e.g., reading in unison).
- Be alert to the possibilities of teasing or bullying toward the student who stutters. Respond in ways that support the student’s self-esteem and confidence, such as:
 - increase understanding and respect for differences
 - develop an atmosphere of zero tolerance for intolerance
 - problem solve with the student who stutters and other team members to develop a plan of action when dealing with teasing.

Parents know their children well and can offer insights on how to support their social and emotional well-being. There is strength in collaborating on strategies that could be used at home, at school and in the community.



As you consider the implications for this medical condition, think about the following questions:

1. Do I need further conversations with the parents to better understand this student's strengths and needs? Yes No
2. Do I need targeted professional learning?
If yes, what specific topics and strategies would I explore? Yes No
3. Is consultation with jurisdictional staff required?
If yes, what issues and questions would we explore? Yes No
4. Is consultation with external service providers required (e.g., Regional Educational Consulting Services, Student Health Partnership, Alberta Children's Hospital, Glenrose Hospital)?
If yes, what issues and questions would we explore? Yes No
5. Are further assessments required to assist with planning for this student?
If yes, what questions do I need answered? Yes No
6. Is service to the student from an external provider required? Yes No
If yes, what outcomes would be anticipated?

Links for further information:

Friends, The National Association of Young People Who Stutter <http://www.friendswhostutter.org>

National Stuttering Association <http://www.nsastutter.org>

ISTAR (Institute for Stuttering Treatment and Research) <http://www.istar.ualberta.ca>

CASLPA (Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists) <http://www.caslpa.ca>

Please note:

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