

Stuttering in Schools: A Resource for Teachers

Stuttering is a problem with speech fluency. Stuttering is thought to be caused by a reduction of connectivity in some parts of the brain that underpin speech production. This results in transient inefficiency in the planning and execution of syllables. Sounds and syllables may be repeated, prolonged, and/or “blocked”, often accompanied by physical signs of struggle and/or anxiety. Stuttering severity varies across individuals and can be worse in certain contexts such as:

- social situations
- talking in front of a group
- talking on the phone
- talking with an authority figure
- when “put on the spot” to talk
- when tired or unwell.

Stuttering is not related to intelligence. However, students who stutter may not show how intelligent they are. They may try to conceal their stuttering by not volunteering to answer questions during class or avoiding talking in front of the class. When called on to speak, they may say as little as possible. They are also at high risk of being teased or bullied by peers.

Stuttering is recognized as a disability by the World Health Organization and by the Australian Human Rights Commission.

How can teachers support a student who stutters?

It is important for a speech pathologist to be involved when you are helping a student who stutters. Another important thing is to talk to the student privately and discuss if the student:

- would like you to help and how you can do this
- is comfortable to answer questions or read aloud during class
- would like stuttering discussed during class
- is being teased or bullied about stuttering.

During class, these are helpful guidelines for supporting a student who stutters:

- The student is likely to prefer not to be called on to speak first.
- Don’t interrupt if the student is “stuck” because of stuttering.
- Wait and don’t finish sentences if the student is stuttering.

Useful links

Australian Stuttering Research Centre

<https://www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/our-research/australian-stuttering-research-centre-stuttering-research-centre>

Stuttering Unit, South Western Sydney Local Health District

www.sswahs.nsw.gov.au/bankstown/stuttering/

Australian Speak Easy Association:

www.speakeasy.org.au/

DVD for teachers: Wait, wait, I’m not finished yet ...

<http://whittington.nhs.uk/default.asp?c=26681>