

Some Suggestions for Teachers for Managing Students Who Stutter

compiled by Marie Poulos

Effective management of the student who stutters in the classroom requires a good understanding of the nature of stuttering as well as a sensitivity to the student's reactions to his speech problem. There are many features of stuttering (e.g., its variability, and its sensitivity to time pressure) that make it difficult to manage or that may make you feel uncomfortable about its management in the classroom setting. But there are things that you as a teacher can do to help the student who stutters communicate more easily, participate more fully in class, and feel better about talking aloud in class.

1. Talk with the student openly about stuttering but don't make a big deal about it. Acknowledge the problem with her and inquire about what classroom activities are more difficult for her to speak in. Ask the student for some suggestions for things that would help to manage her speech in the class and discuss them with her.
2. Allow the student who stutters plenty of time to answer questions in class. Reduce time pressure in the classroom as much as possible.
3. Don't supply words or finish a sentence when the student is having trouble. No one likes words put in his or her mouth. And, of course, if you guess the wrong word, the difficulties multiply.
4. Don't ask the student to substitute an easy word for a hard one as this will only increase the fear of certain words and phrases.
5. Refrain from making comments such as "Slow down," "Relax," "Think before you try to speak," etc. This advice can be felt as demeaning, not constructive, and it does not help.
6. Use a random method to call on students in the class rather than going systematically up and down rows. Making a person who stutters wait his turn in this way greatly increases apprehension or tension.
7. Be flexible (when necessary) in the way a person who stutters is required to participate in classroom activities. For example, if the student has a very difficult time talking in front of the whole class, could smaller groups be set up for reading and presentations? This does not mean the person who stutters should be excused from or avoid participating in class, only that she might participate differently when necessary.
8. Allow plenty of opportunities for the student to speak in class on days when speech is easier. Most people who stutter have "good" and "bad" days; capitalize on the good ones.
9. Praise the student for participating verbally in classroom activity. But praise what they say, not how they say it.
10. Maintain normal eye contact with the student and project a relaxed body language.
11. After a dysfluent utterance, repeat back the content of what the student said. This will ensure understanding and reduce the student's negative memory of the dysfluency.

12. Discourage students from making fun of someone who stutters; discuss stuttering in the class, if the student who stutters feels comfortable with this.

13. Discuss with the student, the speech therapist, and the parents how best to approach the management of this particular student's stuttering and use of speech techniques in the classroom.

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