At the National Stuttering Association, we know that it is okay to stutter. You can learn to manage stuttering successfully. Your SLP, teachers, parents, and friends are all a part of your support team—and so is the NSA!

We have great posters, newsletters, and books about stuttering just for kids, as well as other items to help you with your classroom presentation. Check us out on the web at WeStutter.org.

Remember, you are not alone in dealing with stuttering. Through our publications, resources, website, conferences, and family of caring people who stutter, the National Stuttering Association will be here to help you.

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CREATING POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Like their classmates, children who stutter are often asked to participate in oral reading and oral presentations during everyday classroom activities. These activities may present unique challenges for children who stutter, as the increased speaking demand and time pressure of the activities may significantly increase the child’s likelihood of stuttering. These factors make it more likely they will take a longer time to get through the same amount of content as their classmates.

In truth, the manuals of several widely used assessments speak to the invalid nature of using timed oral reading fluency assessments with children who stutter (or have other speaking difficulties). Unfortunately, most educators do not know that children who stutter may need and are allowed accommodations in this area of formalized assessments. Therefore, SLPs must be advocates for accommodations for timed oral reading fluency and classroom oral presentations.

The accommodations suggested below can help make it more likely that children who stutter will have a more positive classroom experience, be more engaged with reading and presentations, have accurate assessments of their skills, and develop positive reactions toward being a person who stutters.

ORAL READING FLUENCY

Reading fluency is often assessed in school-aged children through the collection of a words-correct-per-minute (WCPM) score. This score is obtained by individually assessing students “as they read aloud for one minute from an unpracticed passage of text” (Hasbrouck, 2006). In many cases, this can result in students who stutter being assessed using a scale that taps straight into their most difficult speaking task—speed and fluidity of speech.

Obtaining a WCPM score involves individual, oral reading of an unpracticed text. These three factors—individual, oral, and unpracticed—tend to heighten anxiety in students, which can lead to an increased number of disfluencies, especially for the child who already stutters. Thus, children who stutter may appear to have less reading fluency, when their performance may be heavily influenced by their stuttering.

Similarly, children are often asked to participate in timed oral presentations in the classroom setting. In general, many rubrics for performance include areas related to “fluency” and “timing” of the presentation. Children who stutter may need accommodations to these standard classroom procedures to ensure accurate assessment of performance.

Parents and SLPs can also be advocates for children who stutter by recommending that these students be exempt from the timed oral reading fluency sections of assessments. These children can be offered alternative silent reading assessments (such as the Test of Silent Work Reading Fluency, or the Test of Silent Contextual Reading Fluency, etc).

If students who stutter wish to participate in timed oral reading fluency assessments (many may not want to be singled out), then parents and SLPs can insist that the scores received will not be used for reading level placement purposes. Rather, teachers can look at multiple measures of ability such as comprehension scores, and daily work to determine reading level placement.

The chart on the back describes the Fluency Levels recommended for oral reading by the United States Department of Education. It should be noted that neither speed nor automaticity are highlighted in this chart below. Children who stutter may benefit from being scored on a rubric (such as the sample below) that does not rely on measures that might be highly impacted by stuttering.

ORAL CLASSROOM PRESENTATIONS

For oral classroom presentations, children who stutter would benefit from removing time restrictions and removing requirements related to fluent speech. Instead, scoring for children who stutter should focus on presenting content areas in a manner that reflects good overall communication patterns outside of fluency.

SLPs can work with educators to help them understand the accommodations children who stutter may need for oral presentations. This will need to happen periodically during therapy, as children progress in their skills. Accommodations will certainly need to be adapted over time.

COLLABORATION IS KEY

Collaboration between parents, teachers, speech-language pathologists, and the child can help determine the individual needs of each child who stutters.

This can be accomplished in several ways:

- Including accommodations for the child when developing an initial individualized education plan (IEP) or 504 plan.
- Requesting a meeting to modify an existing IEP or 504 plan to include accommodations necessary for the child.
- Meetings between parents, teachers, speech-language pathologists, and children (when appropriate) to discuss the individualized needs of the child.
- Ongoing “therapy journal” between the teachers, parents, and speech-language pathologists so that everyone is on the same page with treatment goals.
- Providing materials to classroom teachers to help them understand the nature of stuttering and its potential impact on classroom performance.

Creating an individualized plan for the child who stutters will help maximize the child’s ability to be successful in the classroom as a person who stutters.

SUGGESTED REFERENCES

