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Classroom Strategies for Children/Teens who Stutter

Adapted for Clients by Diane C. Games, 2009 from material developed by Nina Reardon-Reeves, 2000.

Teachers who have children/teens who stutter in class should be part of the treatment process. The teacher needs to understand his/her role in helping the student who stutters with communication in the classroom. A teacher should feel comfortable talking to the student about speech and facilitating problem solving of various speaking situations. Communication assignments should be discussed and adjusted to help the child/teen who stutters. In addition, the teacher should monitor teasing or negative comments from other students.

Here are some tips to facilitate communication with children/teens who stutter:

- **Delay your Responses:** Children/teens who stutter often feel a need to "rush" communication in order to avoid stuttering. However, speed often causes more dysfluencies! Therefore, delaying your response as the teacher will often facilitate a more relaxed pace in the classroom. When you are answering a question, wait for 1-2 seconds before answering. This patterning will create a less rushed atmosphere in the classroom and facilitate more turn taking in communication interactions.
- **Modeling Thinking Time:** While similar to delaying a response, this technique gives students "permission" to think prior to answering. When asked a question, you might preface your answer by saying, "Hmm, let me think..." The silence that follows demonstrates to everyone that thinking time is permitted.
- **Rephrasing:** At times, it may be difficult to understand your student's speech. Asking the teen who stutters to repeat often increases communicative pressure. You might repeat the part of the message that you understood and ask for further information. This helps the student who stutters to focus on the message rather than the delivery.
- **Random Calling:** Many students who stutter feel increased tension when waiting for their turn to talk, present or answer. One way of decreasing this "expectation" pressure is to utilize random selection of students as opposed to "going down the row".
- **Team Discussions:** Communication pressures can be reduced when more than one student is involved in the discussion. Classroom discussions can be facilitated by assigning each student a portion of the reading passage or a specific question to answer. The student who stutters knows he will not be alone when communicating and can plan his response.
- **Oral Presentations:** It is important to "plan" oral presentations with the child/teen who stutters. Spontaneous presentations are frequently difficult for people who stutter. However, children/teen who stutter frequently have an opinion about how classroom presentations

should be handled. Discussing this difficult speaking situation with the student and making a plan is often effective to reduce communication pressure.

REMEMBER:

- **Telling the student to “relax” or “slow down” implies that these suggestions will help communication. While generally true that these strategies may help the student in some situations, stuttering is not a “learned” behavior. Therefore, acceptance is more important to the student than advice.**
- **Use eye contact and body language to send a message to the teen that his/her message is important. Completing words/sentences is not helpful.**
- **Expect the same quality and quantity of work from the student who stutters.**
- **Help all students in class learn to take turns, listen, speak at a moderate speech and eliminate interruptions.**
- **Talk to the teen about his speech and what accommodations in the classroom might help.**
- **Stuttering is a way of talking....not something to be ashamed of....so open communication is important.**