

Teachers' Guide to Working with Young People Who Stutter



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Introduction

This resource was created from research with young New Zealanders who stutter. In this research, they shared the positive and negative experiences they have had at school. They highlighted the importance of their teachers being informed about stuttering, and how this affects their learning and life at school. They also reported bullying, misjudgment, poor self-confidence and not being given appropriate support.

The purpose of this resource is to provide teachers with increased understanding of stuttering and give them strategies for how they can help young people who stutter achieve their potential. It has primarily been developed with the help of young New Zealanders who stutter but also their teachers and speech-language therapists, to ensure it encompasses their combined perspectives and experiences.

In conjunction with the information in this resource, talking to the young person who stutters and understanding their unique experience is essential. A conversation, ideally at the beginning of the school year, could also include whānau and be guided by the Individual Support Plan provided within this resource.



Top 10 Facts about Stuttering

1 Approximately 50,000 individuals stutter in New Zealand and more than 70 million people worldwide

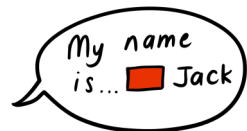


2 Stuttering is NOT an emotional problem

3 Stuttering is considered to be an involuntary interruption to the flow of talking, associated with a feeling of loss of control.

There are different types of stutters:

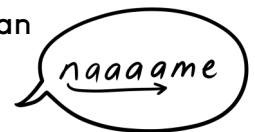
Blocks: This occurs when the individual has a difficult time producing a word causing a tense pause in speech (e.g. My name isJack).



Repetitions: This is a repetition of a sound, syllable, word, or phrase (e.g. na-na-na-name).

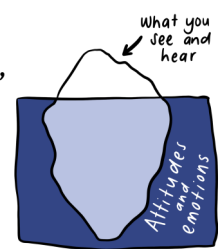


Prolongations: This is when a part of the word is stretched out for an extended amount of time (e.g. naaaaaame).



All of these types of stutters can be accompanied by associated behaviours such as eye blinks or filler words (e.g. um, uh, like).

4 Stuttering also often results in invisible features such as negative feelings, thoughts and beliefs, anxiety and low self-esteem. These are a result of stuttering, not a cause.



5 Researchers haven't identified a single cause for stuttering. Most scientists agree that there are multiple factors involved in stuttering and that genetics and differences in neural processing of speech production play a part.

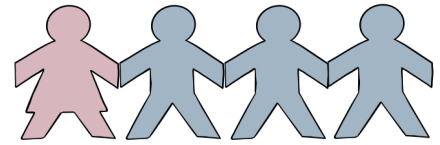


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6 Stuttering is more common in males than females

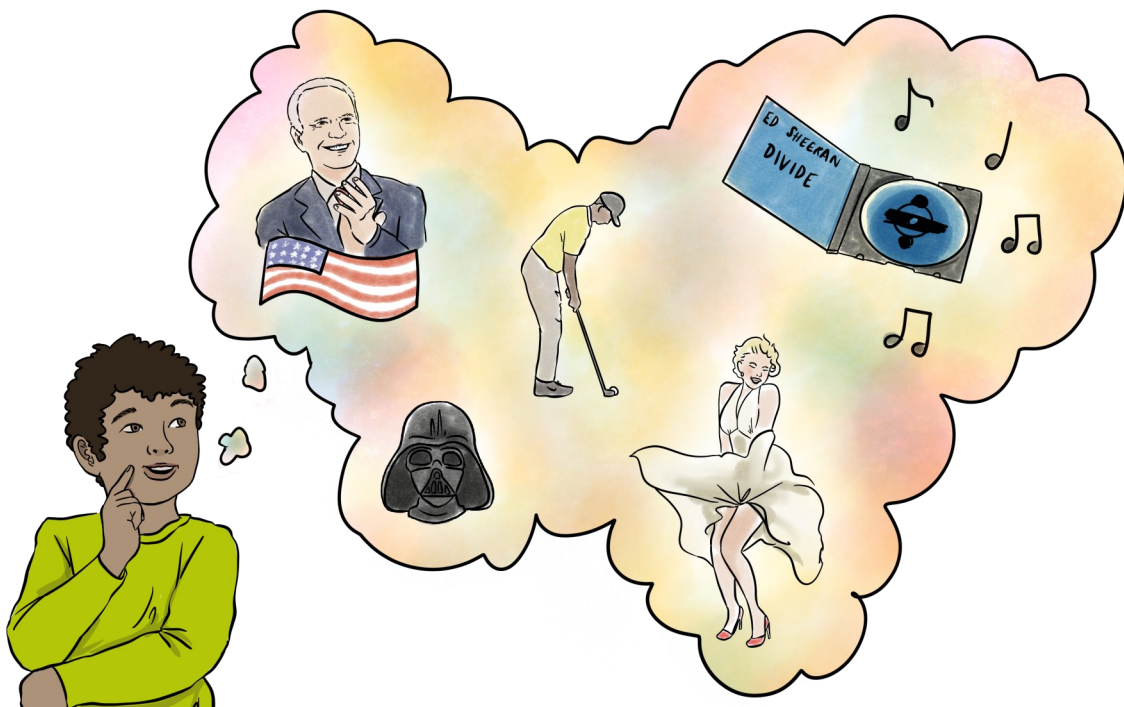


7 There is no quick fix or cure for stuttering, but early intervention (i.e. speech-language therapy) can be effective for young children. For older children and adults, there are tools to make talking easier and to help with associated thoughts and feelings.

8 Stuttering does not mean the individual has lower intelligence

9 Challenging situations may cause the individual who stutters to stutter more (e.g. class presentations, times of high anxiety)

10 Many people who you may have heard of have/had a stutter (e.g. Joe Biden, Ed Sheeran, James Earl Jones, Samuel L. Jackson, Tiger Woods, Marilyn Monroe, Bruce Willis and Rowan Atkinson)



Video Resources



www.stuttering.co.nz/educational-film/



Wait, wait, I'm not finished yet...(short version)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=je7mlAzyD7A



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Reflections from Young New Zealanders Who Stutter

"Parents are normally really good at it but teachers... sometimes you can see it in their eyes, thinking 'why is it taking so long for her to say this?'"- Stephanie, 16

"I think the teachers didn't have much information, they treated it like a disability sort of"
- Sitivi, 24

"People with stutters can still be good leaders especially if you support them through it. My stutter I don't feel has ever held me back from communicating effectively with people or being an effective leader, but sometimes people think that it will before even giving me a chance"
- Andy, 18

"When I was in Year 6 I wanted to do a speech with cue cards, but then I couldn't do it in front of the teachers and I cried a lot. I could not say words, I was just stuttering all the time"- Kevin, 21

"One counsellor told me I shouldn't be a nurse because nurses have to do lots of talking"
- Eunice, 20

"When people realised it was actually a problem and that I couldn't actually control it, they just accepted it"- Ana, 23

"I was always scared to talk to my teachers, ask questions in the class. Always scared that I was made fun of, I would be this timid person who would not ask questions"- Sampson, 20

"There was this one incident in Year 9 when I was in a class and I was reading something out loud and someone made fun of me and I just broke down into tears"- Marcus, 19

"The hardest part was when people would say something and I just froze because it felt like there was something wrong with me and that's why understanding where it comes from is so important"- Aroha, 22



The thing that annoys me and that people don't realise is that I actually really enjoy public speaking, people think I'm nervous but I'm not.

Tāne, 17

"My teachers could see that I stuttered but they never really offered to help with it, they were more worried about studies"-
Phoebe, 25

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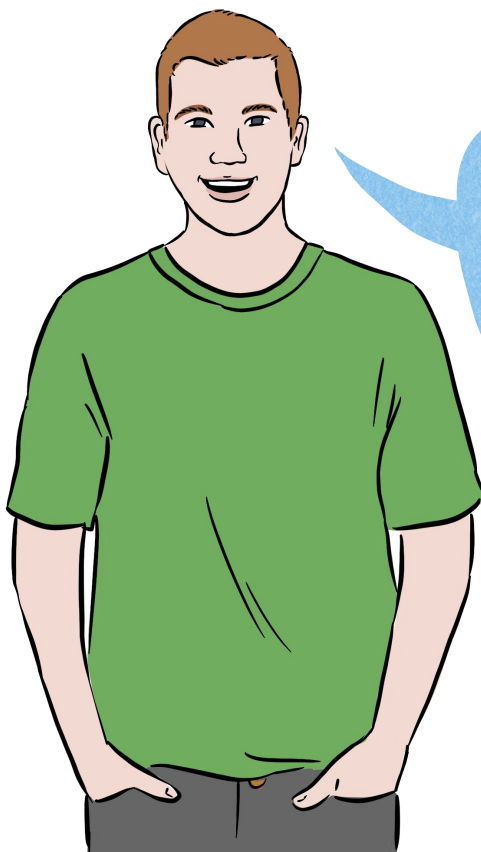
Reflections from New Zealand Teachers

"It was interesting to hear how these students felt on an emotional level. Awareness is key"
- Mrs Peti

"I consider myself to be patient but will make sure to be even more so - especially with him [the learner who stutters]. I will find time to talk with him about his speech and make sure he knows I am happy to help him in any way I can" - Miss Lee

"I just realised that I needed to have a lot of wait time with him, allow him to think through, process and then try to articulate that for me" - Mr Carswell

"Just not putting him on the spot and giving him time [has been helpful]" - Mrs Phillips



This child is just like any other - they just might need some additional help in communicating their ideas verbally.

Mr Klinger

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Helpful Strategies for Young People Who Stutter

The following have been identified as helpful by 16-24 year old New Zealanders who stutter, and are ranked in order of perceived helpfulness:

- Teachers understand the difference between struggling (e.g. avoiding certain activities/ words for fear of stuttering) and stuttering
- Teachers give you time to think and talk/be patient
- Teachers create a safe and relaxing learning environment
- Teachers and classmates don't finish your sentences
- Teachers don't treat you differently (e.g. don't exclude you from activities)
- Teachers allow simple answers (e.g. yes/no)
- Teachers and classmates don't interrupt you when you are speaking
- Teachers work with you and your family to understand you and create specifically designed plans to suit you
- Teachers and classmates are educated/more aware on stuttering and understand how it may affect you
- Teachers take pressure off talking and let you know you don't have to say anything if you don't want to



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Individual Support Plan

Examples

Primary School

Nikora is eleven years old and has been stuttering since he was a preschooler. Recently, you've noticed that he is being teased by his friends when he talks to them at lunchtime. In class, he seems very quiet and self-conscious when he speaks. He gives short responses or avoids answering questions you or others ask by saying "I don't know". He is reluctant to participate in classroom activities and anxious about being called on in class. At times, he gets his mother to explain his situation to you, to avoid speaking or reading in class. He rarely initiates discussions with friends and often sits at the back of the classroom to avoid being noticed.

Suggested tasks to support Nikora:

- Ask Nikora privately whether he'd like to talk to you about his stuttering and check that he has support outside school from parents or whānau
- Discuss with Nikora privately whether there are any strategies that he would like to try, to make speaking situations in class easier (e.g. reading in pairs rather than individually, presenting to a smaller group rather than the whole class, only being asked to answer questions in class if he has his hand up)
- Reassure Nikora that some of the tasks can be modified, so that he can participate in all speaking activities
- Ask Nikora privately to tell you about how the teasing affects him. Consider teaching a module about accepting difference (not particularly about stuttering) to the whole class.
- Discuss with Nikora and his whānau whether they would like to refer Nikora to a speech-language therapist (see How to Refer to a Speech-Language Therapist). If Nikora is working with a speech-language therapist, discuss with him and his whānau whether you could contact him/her to discuss Nikora's specific situation and strategies to support his communication.



- Create an Individual Support Plan with input from Nikora, his whānau, teachers and the speech-language therapist to support Nikora's communication in class and at home
- In consultation with Nikora and his whānau, create a learner profile for Nikora so that all teachers and staff who work with him understand his stuttering
- Consider encouraging Nikora and his whānau to look at reputable websites such as www.stuttering.co.nz (see 'Other Resources' for more information about stuttering and to hear the experiences of other children who stutter) to help build Nikora's confidence

Suggested changes to Nikora's learning environment:

- Care needs to be taken in setting up group work— ensure Nikora works with supportive peers who will give him time to share his ideas verbally
- Provide guidelines for good turn-taking to promote equal involvement and prevent classmates interrupting Nikora while he is stuttering
- In consultation with Nikora and his whānau, consider providing education to all the teachers, staff and learners in his class (e.g. an information sheet or a video to improve attitudes towards stuttering and facilitate healthy peer interactions)
- Be prepared to allow extra time for Nikora to respond to questions or contribute to class discussions
- Consider modifying some of the classroom activities to support Nikora in the classroom (e.g. children who stutter often find it easier to read in unison, rather than individually). If the whole class is asked to read in pairs, this avoids singling out the child who stutters.



Secondary School

Amy is looking forward to studying at university. She often repeats initial sounds or syllables of words such as 'pa ... pa ... paper'. Sometimes it seems her words get stuck and won't come out. When this happens, she grimaces or closes her eyes. Amy is very self-conscious about speaking. You notice that she is becoming withdrawn and that she avoids certain words as well as situations that she used to enjoy or not be afraid of, such as talking to teachers and doing oral presentations. She tells you that she feels upset and sad when her classmates tease her about her stuttering.

Suggested tasks to support Amy:

- Develop an Individual Support Plan with Amy and her whānau to understand the difficulties she has and ways to support her. Include specific strategies to support Amy.
- Keep Amy's goal of going to university part of regular discussion
- Establish a 'go to' person in the school for Amy to talk to whenever she feels upset about being teased
- Take opportunities to privately acknowledge Amy for achieving speaking tasks and reinforce her self-esteem
- Discuss with Amy privately any strategies to help in the situations/contexts she might find difficult at school
- Discuss with Amy and her whānau whether Amy is receiving/has received speech-language therapy. If so, discuss with her and her whānau whether you could contact her speech-language therapist to discuss Amy's specific situation and strategies to support her communication. If not, discuss with her and her whānau whether they would like to refer Amy to a speech-language therapist (see How to Refer to a Speech-Language Therapist).
- Talk to Amy and her whānau about the NCEA assessments that require verbal presentations if this is a concern for Amy. Discuss the possibilities of reducing the audience that Amy presents to or other ways she can present her knowledge (e.g. reading a prepared written presentation).



Suggested changes to Amy's learning environment:

- Care needs to be taken in setting up group work — make sure the classmates she works with will support her and give her time to share her ideas verbally
- Introduce strategies such as 'think, pair, share' to help Amy contribute without the pressure of speaking to a large group
- Provide guidelines for good turn-taking to promote equal involvement and prevent other learners interrupting Amy while she is stuttering
- In consultation with Amy and her whānau (and speech-language therapist), consider providing education to all the teachers, staff and learners in her class (e.g. an information sheet or a video to improve attitudes towards stuttering and facilitate healthy peer interactions)
- Be prepared to allow extra time for Amy to respond to questions or contribute to class discussions



How to Refer to a Speech-Language Therapist

In New Zealand there are a few options for speech-language therapy. Some options can be offered both in-person and online so feel free to enquire and discuss your needs.

You (with parental permission) or the learner's whānau can refer the learner to the speech-language therapy service through the Ministry of Education by contacting your regional MOE office [here](#) or talking to your school's SENCO or LSC

The Stuttering Treatment and Research Trust (START) is the only specialist stuttering clinic offering therapy throughout New Zealand. START offers therapy and support for people of all ages who stutter both in person and via Zoom. You can find more information about their services on their [website](#).

To find a private speech-language therapist you can direct the learner's whānau to the [find a therapist directory through the New Zealand Speech-language Therapists' Association](#).

Massey University (Auckland), University of Auckland (Auckland) and University of Canterbury (Christchurch) offer speech-language therapy at their student clinics where speech-language therapy students provide therapy alongside a clinical supervisor. You can find more information about these clinics at the following links:

[Massey University Speech Language Therapy Clinic](#)

[University of Auckland Speech-language Therapy Teaching Clinic](#)

[University of Canterbury Speech & Hearing Clinic](#)



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Things to Consider

The young person knows the most about their stutter and what helps or doesn't help. In order to support them, it is important to talk with them about their stuttering. This plan should help facilitate discussion and give you some ideas of classroom situations they might find challenging. This sheet could be completed alongside their whānau, and speech-language therapist if applicable.

General considerations for conversations with young people who stutter:

The child or young person needs to be aware of their stuttering and able to voice their preferences in order to be able to participate in this process. It is important to note that some children and young people may find it difficult to talk openly about their stuttering, and some may find it difficult to be able to tell you what strategies they would find helpful.

Ask the child or young person who they are most comfortable having this conversation with. If they are receiving speech-language therapy, you can contact their speech-language therapist if you feel further support is required. Consider involving the family and whānau in the conversation. Ensure you have enough time to have a conversation with the child or young person (e.g. this may need to be after school or during teacher release).

How to use the Individual Support Plan:

- For each section, ask the child or young person how they would like to be supported
- Explain that these adaptations and strategies are ones that others have found useful and tick those that they agree would be helpful for them
- If they do not require support, then tick 'No adaptation needed'
- Any other situation they find challenging and would like to discuss adaptations and strategies for can be included under the 'Additional Details' section

Some children and young people who stutter may find certain situations or days more challenging than others (e.g. feelings towards their stutter, their confidence level, experiencing more impacts of their stuttering on communication) and teachers need to be aware of and mindful of this — regular check-ins are



Individual Support Plan

Detailed Template

Name: _____

Year: _____

Class: _____

How to respond when I stutter

- ☐ Allow time for me to talk
- ☐ Don't interrupt me when I am stuttering
- ☐ Concentrate on what I am saying, not how I am saying it
- ☐ Don't finish my sentences
- ☐ If I am stuck, help me by guessing my words and/or finishing my sentence
- ☐ Avoid advice giving (e.g. telling me to slow down, take a breath, focus on what I am saying)
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ No adaptations needed

Answering the roll

- ☐ I can answer the roll by giving a thumbs up
- ☐ I can answer the roll by raising my hand
- ☐ I can answer the roll using another visual sign I am comfortable with
- ☐ I can answer the roll by saying yes/ae or another word I may prefer
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ No adaptations needed

Reading aloud in class

- ☐ I can give a visual sign that I would like to read aloud in class (e.g. thumbs up/thumbs down)
- ☐ Ask me if I feel comfortable reading aloud on the day
- ☐ I would like to read shorter paragraphs
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ No adaptations needed



Answering questions in class

- ☐ If I put my hand up, this means I want to answer a question
- ☐ If I don't put my hand up, this means I don't want to answer a question
- ☐ I want to answer questions first (before other students)
- ☐ Accept short answers from me rather than long answers
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ No adaptations needed

Classroom discussion and oral presentations

- ☐ I will give oral presentations a go (even if I may find it challenging)
- ☐ I can present in front of a small group
- ☐ I can present in front of the teacher
- ☐ I can have a friend in my group for group discussions
- ☐ I can have discussions in small groups rather than large groups
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ No adaptations needed

Online classes (if applicable)

- ☐ I can have the option to use the online chat instead of talking
- ☐ I can have the option to turn the front-facing camera off
- ☐ At the end, you can check-in with me to see if I have any questions
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ No adaptations needed



Dealing with teasing and bullying

- ☐ I would like the teacher to talk to the class about teasing and bullying (not stuttering-specific)
- ☐ I can role-play scenarios (e.g. with a teacher, parent or friend) to practice how to deal with bullying (e.g. someone being the bully, person being bullied and a bystander)
- ☐ I can ignore the bully
- ☐ I can talk to friends in the class about teasing and bullying
- ☐ I can tell my parents about teasing and bullying OR You can tell my parents about teasing and bullying
- ☐ I can tell the teacher when it's happening and come up with a solution together
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ No adaptations needed

Meetings between my school, whānau, and speech-language therapist

- ☐ I would like to have my whānau present
- ☐ I would like to have my speech-language therapist present
- ☐ I would like to have meetings between just myself and the teacher
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ No adaptations needed

Additional details

Agreed on: _____ Review on: _____

Stuttering can vary over time and therefore the best ways to support the learner who stutters will change. Ask the learner when they think a reasonable review date may be.

Please circulate to:



Individual Support Plan

Simple Template

Name: _____ Year: _____ Class: _____

How to respond when I stutter

Answering the roll

Reading aloud in class

Answering questions in class

Classroom discussions and oral presentations



Online classes (if relevant)

Dealing with teasing and bullying

Meetings between my school, whānau, and speech-language therapist

Additional details

Agreed on: _____ Review on: _____

Stuttering can vary over time and therefore the best ways to support the learner who stutters will change. Ask the learner when they think a reasonable review date may be.

Please circulate to:

This Individual Support Plan is adapted from *The Michael Palin Centre for Stammering Children* and *NHS Islington 'Pupil Planning Sheet'*.



Other Resources

Stuttering Treatment and Research Trust:

<https://www.stuttering.co.nz>

Speech, language and communication needs resource for educators:

<https://www.inclusive.tki.org.nz/assets/inclusive-education/MOE-publications/MOESE0044SpeechLanguageandCommunicationNeeds-booklet.pdf>

Much more than words:

<https://seonline.tki.org.nz/Educator-tools/Much-More-than-Words>

Developing an inclusive classroom culture:

<https://www.inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/developing-an-inclusive-classroom-culture/>

Stuttering Foundation 'For Teachers' (USA based): <https://www.stutteringhelp.org/teachers>

Action for Stammering Children 'Support for Schools' (UK based):

<https://actionforstammeringchildren.org/support/support-for-schools/>



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