

Back to School with Confidence

Supporting Students Who
Stutter at School

**FREE
TOOLKIT**

SAY: The Stuttering
Association
for the Young

Building a Community of Support

At SAY, we believe that all children who stutter deserve to have a supportive community around them, where they will always have a voice. We also know that school can be a tough place for children who stutter. For some, the pressures may be self-imposed, and the child who stutters may go to great lengths to try to hide the fact that they stutter. For others, the pressure they experience may occur in the form of bullying and discrimination. They may encounter bullying and discrimination from their classmates, or even from teachers and other adults who work there. Many people—students, teachers, and speech therapists—may be misinformed about stuttering. **The most important way to support a child who stutters is to build community and educate others about stuttering.**

For parents, you (or your child) should bring up stuttering with teachers and others who work with your child at school:

- Send an email
- Have a conversation with teachers or administration over the phone
- Schedule an in-person meeting with school staff
- Invite school staff to see a SAY performance to see a stutter-affirming environment in action!

Even if your child is not yet ready to be the one to educate their teachers and school staff, include them in deciding what you say and consider having them there to watch you do it. By educating others about stuttering, you can help school staff better understand what your child is experiencing and how they can help.

Spreading **Stuttering** Awareness

Here are some things to include when educating others about stuttering:

- **People who stutter just need a little extra time to speak.** You don't need to finish their words or help them when they are stuttering – you just need to listen.
- **Stuttering is nobody's fault.** Stuttering happens because of subtle differences in the brain's pathways during speech. It is **not** brain damage or injury; it's a variation in the way that some people talk.
- **Stuttering is variable.** Stuttering changes over time and may be different from day to day, month to month, or even hour to hour! This can be confusing to some listeners (and frustrating for many people who stutter), but remember: this is very typical for people who stutter.
- **Stuttering cannot be "cured."** While some young children may outgrow stuttering after 6 months to a year, there are other children who will persist into adulthood. This is not because of anything they or their family did wrong. Though stuttering can't be cured, receiving support from their loved ones, the stuttering support community, and/or a speech pathologist can help people who stutter make positive changes to how stuttering impacts their ability to confidently communicate.

Talk to your child to learn more about what they want others to know about themselves or stuttering. In addition to teachers, you can look to build community by speaking with speech therapists, social workers, guidance counselors, or coaches. Especially if your child has other learning needs or mental health challenges, getting help from any of these other individuals can make a big difference.

The Individualized Education Plan

An **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)** is a legal plan that public schools create (with parent approval) to make sure children with learning or participation differences get the same quality of education as their peers. The plan sets goals for the child and explains what special education or support services they'll receive, and how often. Parents can request an evaluation at any time, usually by asking the teacher to begin the process. Children who stutter are often eligible for an IEP if stuttering affects their classroom participation, schoolwork, or social interactions. However, not every child who stutters will need one—the IEP is simply a tool to provide extra support when it is helpful.

Example of part of an IEP for stuttering services:

Types of Services	Frequency	Time
Speech Therapy Services: Speech therapist will meet with Sam 1-on-1 to address stuttering attitudes/emotions, behaviors, and functional communication skills.	1x/ week	30 mins.
Classroom Accommodations: Sam will be provided with additional time to respond to questions and share information aloud to reduce time pressure and the possibility of interruptions during stuttering moments.	Daily	N/A
Support for Personnel: All teachers working with Sam should receive training and resources pertaining to how to best support and communicate with a student who stutters	Speech Pathologist will give staff training 1x at start of school year, with additional training as needed	N/A

Benefits and Parent's Rights

An IEP can be helpful if:

- Stuttering is impacting your child's ability to learn and thrive in the school setting. A skilled, school-based speech therapist can be added to your child's team to identify reasonable and meaningful goals towards increasing your child's confidence and independence while communicating at school.
- There is a need for other services, or if there are other classroom concerns, such as special reading or learning needs, in addition to stuttering.

Be a strong advocate. Unfortunately, sometimes not everyone on an IEP team has a good understanding of stuttering. Follow your gut, educate the team about your child, and ask lots of questions. Consult with SAY or a stuttering specialist if something doesn't feel right.

As a parent, you have many rights related to your child's IEP. You can, and should, participate in all IEP meetings where decisions about your child's plan are made. You also have the right to deny consent for services or to contest decisions that you do not agree with. And your child can be a part of the IEP meetings, too. It can make a huge difference for kids to advocate for themselves or for them to hear you advocating for them. They should have a voice in setting their own goals and accommodations.

If stuttering is not impacting your child's ability to learn and thrive in the school setting, but you still want to be sure that they are provided with accommodations and protections in class, do not fear! A 504 Plan may be a better option for you. The **Stuttering Foundation** has more information about the process here: <http://bit.ly/2lnixaD>

504 Plans and Classroom Accommodations

The **504 Plan** is a formal document that explains how the school and its staff will accommodate the student's needs to be sure that the child does not have any unfair disadvantages because of their stutter. Unlike Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), 504 plans do not typically provide speech therapy.

Common accommodations include:

- Additional wait time for the student to speak
- Alternative ways to participate/present and a meeting/s with teachers to build confidence and fade these accommodations over time
- Fair and appropriate grading for presentations to ensure the student isn't penalized for stuttering
- Alternative reading assessments to accurately determine reading level and not penalize for stuttering
- Monitoring for teasing/bullying

The key is giving students choices and making sure they aren't penalized for stuttering while still meeting learning standards. Some may rarely use these accommodations, but knowing they exist builds confidence. **To request a 504 Plan, parents should submit a written request (with optional documentation from a doctor or speech therapist).** Schools are required by law to accommodate eligible students, and children who stutter qualify because stuttering substantially limits one or more of their major life activities, including speaking and communicating, under Section 504. Even if families face challenges or pushback, the most important step is helping children build confidence and resilience—so support comes not only from school, but also from within.

Building Resilience

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from challenges. It grows from strength, hope, and self-compassion—and parents can play a big role in helping children develop it. For kids who stutter, resilience can be especially valuable for coping with communication struggles and building independence.

Even in the most supportive schools, children who stutter may face difficulties. A positive home environment helps prepare them. **The most powerful tools parents can offer are listening and empathy.** When a child feels truly heard, they feel validated and know their voice matters. For example, if your child stutters while telling you an exciting story, try to focus on their message and share their joy, rather than interrupting with advice about stuttering. Many parents feel frustrated when their child doesn't want to open up about stuttering. However, even if your child doesn't take you up on it, knowing that you periodically give them space to share about stuttering is a very powerful thing.

Resilience also grows through confidence and a positive outlook. **You can support this by:**

- Praising effort and perseverance, not just results
- Helping them recognize their strengths and accomplishments
- Encouraging gratitude, kindness, and perspective
- Encouraging increasing participation and responsibilities along a hierarchy of difficulty with their input

By creating a safe, supportive space at home, parents can help children who stutter feel strong, confident, and ready to face challenges.

It Takes a Village

Who is in your child's village? Creating a team of people surrounding your child that "get" stuttering is essential. This team should include family members, friends, teachers, etc. Importantly, you and other adults in a child's world can be role models for resilience. Take time to consider how you respond to hard situations. Can you show patience and empathy to others? Can you find the positive when things don't go as planned? Can you be okay with your mistakes and take responsibility for your actions?

Your children will see these things in you, and it will help them to better understand themselves as they go to school and develop into independent young adults.

Resilience doesn't have to do with how much a person stutters. It's about knowing that you are capable and good enough as you are – no matter how much you do or do not stutter.

Growing up and going to school can be a challenge for any child who stutters. But by building a community of support, understanding your administrative options for support in schools (as with an IEP or 504 Plan), and most importantly, by fostering confidence and resilience at home, your child will be in a position to thrive and to be their best self.

Join our Community

SAY: The Stuttering Association for the Young is a leading national nonprofit dedicated to supporting young people who stutter, their families, and professionals. Through summer camps, regional day camps, speech therapy, creative arts programming, parent groups, and professional trainings, SAY fosters a community of acceptance, friendship, and encouragement where kids and teens who stutter can build the confidence and communication skills they need to thrive. We offer sliding scale rates for Camp SAY and SAY: Speech, and all other programs are free.

Visit say.org/programs to learn more.

Reach out to us with any questions or concerns about stuttering and how to support children who stutter in any setting.



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