The Neurodivergent Classroom

Stuttering at a Glance

Stuttering is a fluency disorder involving repetitions, prolongations or blocks. How noticeable it is, and how much it weighs on the student, can change a lot from one situation to the next.



What you may notice in class

- You hear repetitions, prolongations or blocks.
- Speech varies from one situation to the next.
- Their body tenses up while speaking.
- They raise their hand less often.
- Avoids certain words or speaking situations.
- Classmates interrupt or mimic them.
- Asks to answer in writing or with tech.
- For younger kids, reading aloud, quick-fire rounds and mimicking make joining in hard. (elementary school)
- For older students, presentations and tests are especially hard. (middle and high school)

Strengths

- Can show what they know in many ways.
- Knows the material, fluent speech or not.
- Often knows which ways of communicating work best.
- Their own goals and wishes can guide lesson planning.
- Other ways of expressing themselves let them join in.

What helps

- Focus on the person and what they're saying.
- Wait, and don't finish their sentences.
- Don't ask the student to slow down.
- Let the student repeat or rephrase answers themselves.
- Make sure everyone gets to finish and nobody mimics.
- Talk about presentations and tests early on.
- Find out which conditions let their knowledge show.
- Ask what the student wants.
- Hold everyone to the same conversation rules.
- With younger kids, use conversation rules and a choice of ways to answer. (elementary school)
- With older students, agree on prep time and fair test conditions. (middle and high school)

What tends not to help

- Interrupting or finishing the student's sentences.
- Asking the student to speak more slowly.
- Put-downs, mimicking and time pressure.
- Treating speaking less as knowing less.

Words that carry

"I'm listening. No rush."

"I want to see what you know. What would help?"

"We let everyone finish, and we don't copy how people talk."

"Take your time. We're listening." (elementary school)

"Let's plan your presentation around your strengths." (middle and high school)

Where to find support

The Stuttering Foundation
stutteringhelp.org
US nonprofit with free materials for teachers and families.

STAMMA stamma.org
British Stammering Association with guidance for schools.

International Stuttering Association
isastutter.org
Umbrella body of national self-help organizations worldwide.

Local organizations
Many countries have their own stuttering self-help association, for example the National Stuttering Association in the US (westutter.org).

More in the Teacher Portal: neurodivergentclassroom.com/teacher-portal/stuttering/

Sources: ASHA: Stuttering, Cluttering, and Fluency, Practice Portal · RCSLT: Stammering overview · NIDCD: Stuttering · The Stuttering Foundation: Notes to the teacher