

THESE ARE A FEW OF MY FAVORITE THINGS

THERAPY PLAN FOR MANY PRESCHOOL CHILDREN WHO STUTTER

The choice of activities (puzzles, play doh, paint with water, finger paints, books) is done deliberately to contribute to the child's fluency. None of the activities listed puts stress on a child to communicate at a high level. In addition, the fact that the child and adult are doing or manipulating materials makes it unnecessary to be talking all the time. It is important that pressure to communicate at a high level does not occur as often as it may have before. We realize that pressure to communicate occurs from two directions: from the adults in the child's life or from older siblings, and from the demands the child places on herself/himself to verbalize thoughts.

For the above reasons, the therapy design for your child is likely to include these goals:

Reducing the amount of talking the child does. This strategy makes it necessary to do activities in which the doing itself occupies time and takes concentration. A child and adult should be talking only a little while manipulating materials such as play doh and shape cutters or painting with water/paints in picture books. Over half of the activity time should be silent. Both adult and child are busy doing the motor manipulation of materials rather than talking about them.

Reducing the stress of competition for performing well. This strategy requires the adult to make errors in performing the activity. For example, the adult paints/colors outside the lines; the play doh shape made by the adult is not well-formed and needs to be remade or a dinosaur leg falls off and so forth. The adult does not complete the project faster than the child can finish. Mistakes are "no big deal." The attitude to convey is that we are learning to grow in skills.

Reducing the turn-taking characteristic of the talking that does occur. This strategy directs the adult to interact verbally in a style different

from conversation. Instead of each taking a verbal turn and responding in a way to further the idea, adults change to more of the “following-after” style of interaction. The adult becomes the verbal follower and lets the child be the verbal leader. The child talks first, and the adult comments briefly, but does not add the adult’s own ideas. As you can see, this style is not a real conversational interchange of ideas. It isn’t particularly interesting for the adult, but it’s a strategy that helps the child to speak more fluently.

Reducing the language level at which the child talks. This strategy requires a complete turn-around from the way most parents talk with their children. It is the exact opposite of language stimulation. Refrain from “expanding” or elaborating on the child’s utterances. Don’t “teach” vocabulary to your child right now. Talk in shorter sentences, simpler ideas and speak at a slower rate so the child will follow our model. The words are still said smoothly—not choppy with a break between each word. We cannot direct a young child to talk slower or simpler. But if we choreograph the scene so that we talk simpler and slower, your child is very likely to alter his/her own talking; and, your child is very likely to speak more fluently.

Are adults in our child’s environment to alter their talking forever? Of course not. Typically, 3-6 months is sufficient for a child to regain fluency. And, your child’s mind and thinking is not going to stop growing if you stimulate less for a few months. Besides, it is impossible for adults to talk slower and more simply all the time. All of use forget and do some “teaching” of vocabulary and concepts. Your child is not likely to regress in communication level—it’s just that she/he is now moving ahead verbally a bit more slowly.

Reducing the impact that a younger or older sibling has on the child’s life. This is a hard reality to deal with. Many children feel “pushed out” or “replaced” by a sibling. Sometimes a baby took the child’s favored place in the family dynamics. Sometimes it’s an older child who doesn’t want the younger child to “tag along.” Can you find a way to have some “special time” with this child who is disfluent when

the younger or the older can't be included? Sometimes activities for a 3-4 year old only may be the route to take. For some children, a sibling is an added stress factor. Hopefully patience and time will soften the impact of the sibling.

Reducing the excitement level in the child's life. Excitement is the one major characteristic that causes most preschool children and early elementary age children to speak disfluently. Do what you can to reduce high and moderate excitement in your family's activity level. You may have to do some good detective work to discover what excites your child. Reduce excitement when you can without having the child be bored. Some children excite themselves by their ideas and own creativity. Admittedly this is a difficult aspect to deal with. Most parents and therapists are not very successful in reducing the excitement that arises from the child's own ideas.

Source: Judith Eckardt, SLP, Board Recognized Fluency Specialist,
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