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Stuttering Center News

Involving Parents in School-Based Therapy

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Inside this Issue

- 1 Involving Parents in School-Based Therapy
- 2 SLP Corner: Enhancing Parents' Role in Treatment
- Message from the Stuttering Center
- 3 Upcoming Stuttering Center Events
- Enhancing Parents' Role in Assessment
- 4 Profile: David Hammer, M.A., CCC-SLP
- Contact Us

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Sumer Lombardo, M.A., CCC-SLP & Craig Coleman, M.A., CCC-SLP

Involving parents members in treatment can pose a unique challenge for speech-language pathologists working in the schools. Because many school clinicians do not have the opportunity to see families as much as they might in other settings, they may forget to include them in therapy. Regardless of our specific work setting, however, it is important to involve parents in therapy for children who stutter, particularly because stuttering can be affected by so many different aspects of a child's life.

It is equally important to educate the child *and* the family about stuttering. As school-based SLPs, we need to find out what the children and parents already know about stuttering before developing a plan for treatment. Explaining that stuttering is a *communication* problem, and not an emotional problem, can be the first step in relieving stress for some parents and children. Educating parents and others about stuttering can empower them to take more responsibility for the changes we want to see in therapy.

Sometimes, meeting with families may be difficult because of conflicting school or work schedules. Try making a phone call or sending literature for parents to review. Examples include materials from the National Stuttering Association (www.WeStutter.org) and the Stuttering Foundation of America (www.StutteringHelp.org), as well as our own Stuttering Center of Western Pennsylvania (www.StutteringCenter.org). Documents about what can be done at home, what is being done at school, and current research in the field can be very helpful for keeping parents "in the loop"

Help parents learn that they can have a significant influence on how their child feels about stuttering and how well they progress in therapy. Some helpful hints to pass along to parents include:

- *Model slower communication rates (for younger children only – PBS's Mr. Rogers is a great example).
- *Encourage conversational turn-taking skills at home to reduce interruptions.
- *Listen to the *content* of the message, rather than the manner in which it is said (i.e., fluent vs. non-fluent).
- *Allow your child to talk about stuttering and what he is learning in therapy.
- *Minimize time pressure the child may feel when talking
- *Avoid asking too many questions, one after the other, in rapid succession.
- *Let the child finish his thoughts before interjecting your own.
- *Look at the child when he speaks and show by your expression that you are interested in what he is saying, not just how he is saying it.
- *Accept your child as she is; don't reject her or give her the impression of rejection.
- *Don't let your child avoid normal responsibilities. Use the same discipline as with any other child.
- *Don't supply words. Let your child get his words out himself.
- *Avoid suggestions such as: "Think before you speak" "Talk slower (or faster)" "Wait 'till you can say it"...etc.
- *Encourage the child to speak freely at home and in other settings.

When we educate parents, they gain a better understanding of their child's stuttering and how to respond properly when the child needs help. Working with the family, you can develop a comprehensive plan that outlines the objectives and procedures of therapy and describes a sensible approach to managing the child's stuttering outside of the school setting. With the full support of an educated family, we can do our job that much better and that much more successfully.



SLP Corner: Enhancing Parents’ Role in Treatment

Amanda Gilbert, B.A. &
Craig Coleman, M.A., CCC-SLP

Clinicians can improve their treatment outcomes by involving parents in all aspects of treatment for children who stutter. Helping parents learn about stuttering is one the best ways to educate and connect them with their children. Involving parents not only facilitate improvement of fluency; it also helps them help their children with the difficult situations they may face because of their stuttering. You can enhance parents’ success by providing them with resources to help them gain further knowledge about stuttering. Websites, books, videotapes, and support groups can help parents become more active participants in treatment.

The importance of communicating with parents cannot be underestimated. Involving parents increases their motivation to become more involved in treatment. Parents can also provide useful insights about what to address in treatment. Some specific factors parents can address might include:

- *Aspects of the environmental that reduce or increase stuttering behaviors
- *Personality traits of the child
- *Activities the child enjoys and dislikes
- *Communication styles of the child (and the family)
- *How the child is responding to therapy, both at home and at school

Another way of involving parents is to encourage them to observe treatment sessions, either at school or from a videotape. This not only helps parents increase their understanding of what you are doing in therapy; it also shows them that their involvement in therapy is appreciated *and* welcomed. Parent

participation also helps to extended your treatment into the child’s real world. The more the family knows about treatment, the more they will be able to support your work at home. Ultimately, this will improve generalization of the strategies learned in therapy.

You can also teach parents the strategies used in therapy. For example, parents can participate in pseudo-stuttering activities, or apply techniques such as cancellation or pullout. This helps them work with the child at home, and it shows them how hard it for children to change their speech. This demonstrates the perseverance and commitment necessary to use techniques consistently and effectively. Parents can even help children overcome negative cognitive and emotional reactions to stuttering. If parents have come to terms with stuttering, they can talk openly with the child about his speech and provide further support and guidance out of therapy.

Teaching parents about therapy and how it affects their child is just one way you can involved them in therapy. Not only does parental involvement provide additional support for the child, it also help parents know that they have an important role in helping their child deal with stuttering. This also helps parents support their child’s emotional response to stuttering and encourages them to use therapy techniques in environments outside of the clinical setting.



Send your own treatment ideas to Craig Coleman at craig.coleman@chp.edu!

Coming Up: The 21st Annual Conference of the National Stuttering Association (NSA)

Make plans now to attend the NSA’s 21st Annual Conference, to be held from **June 24 to 27** in Baltimore, MD.

The conference is a great opportunity for your clients *and their families* to connect with other people who have had similar experiences. Full info can be found on the NSA website at www.WeStutter.org.

Message From the Stuttering Center
Craig Coleman J. Scott Yaruss



This edition of the *Stuttering Center News* focuses heavily on parent involvement in both assessment and treatment of children who stutter. Parents, through both their feedback and ability to carry out objectives at home, are a critical part of the assessment and treatment process. Without their **strong** support and commitment, treatment is not likely to be successful.

Please let us know if you have any comments or suggestions. You can also submit articles or ideas for future articles. We now have over 250 people who receive the *Stuttering Center News* and we look forward to more joining us soon!

Enhancing Parents' Role in Assessment

Lauralee Pudup, B.A. &
Craig Coleman, M.A., CCC-SLP

When evaluating school-aged children who stutter, clinicians must recognize that both children and parents are valuable sources of information. This article focuses on information you can discuss with parents during the initial assessment or during a parent interview in the early stages of treatment.

Parents can provide information about how the child is reacting to his or her speaking difficulties. Just as importantly, parents can provide input about how *they* are reacting to the child's stuttering. When working with parents of children who stutter, don't forget to ask them how *they* feel about their child's speech. Many parents experience fear or uncertainty about their child's future. Sometimes, parents may be embarrassed about how their child's speech sounds, and they may not know how to respond when their child stutters. Keep in mind that the parent's reactions to stuttering can also provide insights about how the child is likely to respond to stuttering.

Find out if the parents' concerns are limited to speech or if they have other concerns about the child's social skills, academics, etc. A parents' involvement in therapy can be affected by the degree to which they are concerned about stuttering as opposed to other issues.

Ask the parents about their expectations for treatment. Helping parents identify realistic and unrealistic expectations, and make sure that their goals for treatment are consistent with your goals and the child's goals.

Many parents have learned treatment strategies from alternate sources (e.g., magazines, television, the internet, or other clinicians). You will want to know what the parents have already learned, and possibly implemented. You can also explain how some alternative treatment methods might not prove successful, or are not based on solid research. Some parents may even have implemented their own ideas without seeking input

from outside sources. By asking parents what they know about stuttering, you can more effectively guide parents about proper approaches to treatment.

Find out what communication stressors are present in the child's life. Is he competing with other children or family members to talk? Is he constantly in a fast paced environment where it is difficult for him to take the time he needs to talk? For many children, these factors can make it harder for children to maintain fluency or to concentrate on treatment strategies.

Ask how the child's stuttering affects relationships with his peers. If a child is experiencing teasing or bullying, he may be more likely to tell his parents than a clinician he has just recently met. Further, if the child is being teased or bullied, he is likely to feel embarrassed by this and this is something that should be addressed in treatment.

For many children, stuttering can negatively affect their performance in school. Ask the parents if they noticed a decrease in participation at school or if the child's schoolwork has suffered because of stuttering.

Find out what the parents think stuttering is and what they think causes it. Misconceptions should be corrected early in the process of therapy, for parental misunderstanding about stuttering, and about the goals of treatment, can have a negative effect on the child's progress in treatment.

Ask the parents about whether the child gets frustrated when he is having difficulty talking. Understanding the child's degree of frustration can help you determine whether, or how much, your therapy will need to address the child's reactions to stuttering. This will also give you insights into how well the child is coping with his stuttering.

Inquire about what treatments the child has received in the past. Ask what the treatment involved, how the child responded, what the parents thought of it, and what the results were. This is especially important for helping you determine whether the child and family view treatment positively or negatively.

Upcoming Events

Stuttering Center staff will present many workshops in the coming months. For information, check our website (www.StutteringCenter.org) or email craig.coleman@chp.edu.

May 7, 2004 – Washington, DC
J. Scott Yaruss – *Practical Treatment Strategies for Children who Wtutter* (Sponsored by the [National Stuttering Association](http://NationalStutteringAssociation.org))

May 12, 2004- Indianapolis, IN
May 13, 2004- Springfield, IL
May 20, 2004 – Atlantic City, NJ
May 21, 2004 - Edison NJ
J. Scott Yaruss - *Children who stutter: strategies for clinical practice* (sponsored by [Medical Education Services / Professional Development Network](http://MedicalEducationServices.com); MEDS-PDN)

You can get handouts from many presentations by J. Scott Yaruss and Craig Coleman at our website – www.StutteringCenter.org. Look in the Handouts section

If you would like information about how to schedule an in-service presentation or workshop in your area with either J. Scott Yaruss or Craig Coleman, just let us know!

Of course, you'll also want to ask more standard questions such as: When did the child start stuttering? How has the stuttering changed since that time? Has the child experienced other speech or language difficulties? Is there a family history of stuttering or other speech or language concerns (particularly stuttering)? What types of disfluencies do parents see? Do they notice tension or struggle during stuttering

By collecting this information from parents, you will be ready to plan treatment that meets the needs of each individual child, and you will have involved the parents in planning from the very beginning of treatment.

Staff Profile:

David Hammer M.A., CCC-SLP



By Craig Coleman, M.A., CCC-SLP

David Hammer is a speech-language pathologist at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, North Satellite (Wexford). He originated the parent-child training program used at Children's Hospital and the Stuttering Center of Western PA. In addition to being an expert about stuttering (he is the former Co-Director of the Stuttering Center), Mr. Hammer is also nationally known for his work in childhood apraxia of speech. I asked Mr. Hammer several questions about his views on stuttering:

Q: What positive changes have you seen in the field of stuttering?

A: I believe that we are much more realistic about what we are capable of accomplishing when we work with children who stutter. Although we focus on the stuttering symptoms, we know that there is much more to treatment than symptom modification. Many SLPs have avoided working with children who stutter due to a lack of confidence in knowing how to treat this puzzling disorder, and their frustration that the symptom can be so persistent. We are now reaching out more to practicing therapists through presentations, workshops, newsletters such as this one, etc. which help SLPs feel more comfortable treating children who stutter. It also enables them to understand better what constitutes "progress" other than just symptom change. We are better attuned to the need for parent involvement in therapy, and we know more about how to accomplish this systematically.

Q: What do you see as the primary areas that need to be addressed in the field of stuttering?

A: We need to train more therapists in childhood stuttering diagnosis and treatment at the graduate school level. It is a challenge to find therapists coming out of graduate school who feel any degree of comfort in working with children

who stutter. I continue to be surprised at how little is known by most teachers about children who stutter and how they should respond in the classroom setting. SLPs need to reach out to teachers, for they can have a profound impact on children in their classrooms. I work in an outpatient hospital setting, but I feel that some of the best treatment can be done in the school setting, where practice, carryover, and generalization can take place more easily.

Q: What is something every clinician who treats stuttering should know?

A: I think every clinician needs to remember how incredibly difficult it is for children of all ages to expend the energy to use the strategies and techniques that we teach. Sometimes parents get very frustrated with their children when they don't use the strategies they have been taught. It is our responsibility to make sure that we discuss this with parents so that criticism is avoided and positive support and empathy are provided. We need to make sure that the strategies we introduce do not cause the children's speech to sound dramatically different than their peers, or children will quickly dismiss them.

Q: How will the field change in the next 10 years?

A: I think we will discover much more about the genetics and neurology of stuttering. While I am not optimistic that this will have a significant impact on how we conduct therapy, it will help us understand and explain to parents about etiological and sustaining factors. As any clinician would hope, I would love to see that we are closer to being able to alter the genetic factors that result in the occurrence of stuttering before the symptom ever appears.

Q: You were primarily responsible for establishing the parent-child training program for preschool stuttering at CHP. What do you see as the strengths and limitations of that program?

A: The step-by-step procedures used at CHP, which can be organized in a 6-session program, provide an indirect approach to therapy that may be all that

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The Stuttering Center offers evaluation and treatment for children who stutter through Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh in Oakland and at our satellite offices in Bethel Park, Monroeville, and Wexford. Visit the Children's Hospital website at www.chp.edu for directions.

Find us on the Web!

www.stutteringcenter.org

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Send us your questions
and comments!!

is necessary to bring about positive changes in a child's fluency. The program provides an intermediate alternative between "no treatment" and more "direct" therapy. This can be useful when you're not sure whether the child will recover without intervention.

The program also boosts therapist (and parent) confidence. Many clinicians feel limited in their ability to gather information about how often strategies are used at home. By providing real-time feedback to parents during treatment, we help parents incorporate techniques into their daily interactions. This helps to improve compliance in treatment and ultimately, improves the child's success.

For more information about the Stuttering Center's Parent-Child Treatment Program, check our website at www.StutteringCenter.org.