



Finding
our
Voices:
Stuttering
as a
Student



Who Am I?

Hello, I'm Cami McDaniel. I am a senior at Monte Vista Christian School (a previous PVUSD student) and a person who stutters.



As you can imagine, this speech difference affects all areas of my life, especially my academic life. In elementary school, I attended speech therapy with the school provided speech therapist, which covered technical strategies for easier speech to an extent. My knowledge and awareness of my stutter remained limited throughout those years, as the speech therapist was not a specialist in stuttering. My lack of knowledge kept me from advocating for myself in classroom settings. In class, I had trouble reading out loud, answering questions spontaneously, presenting, and participating in verbal activities.

Because these activities are standard and expected in classroom environments, I frequently felt anxious. I struggled with many activities knowing that my speech was not like the other kids. Despite the struggles I experienced daily, I never said anything. Not to my teachers, my friends, or even to my speech therapist. I presumed that asking for help and accommodations was cheating and not allowed.

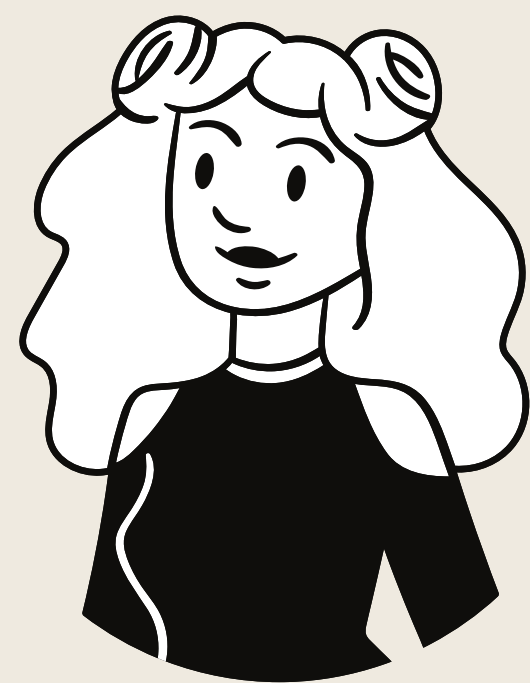
Little did I know that there are many classroom accommodations for kids who stutter- that I did not need to feel anxious in class. If someone had told me that there were alternatives for activities I could ask for, years of bullying, negative self perception, and anxiety could have been prevented. That is why I'm sharing my experiences and making these packets. This packet includes a brief explanation of the underlying feelings and emotions that can come from having a stutter, a list of classroom accommodations, and ways to be an ally for children who stutter (CWS). I want to increase stuttering awareness and knowledge of classroom accommodations for children who stutter- children like me. I hope to contribute to a positive classroom environment and to supporting an eagerness to participate and learn amongst CWS.

Thank you for taking time to read this; please consider implementing these accommodations.

Cami M.

Underlying Feelings and Emotions

Teachers are essential communication facilitators for students who stutter. An encouraging relationship built on trust and understanding promotes easy, comfortable, confident speech in the classroom. Students who stutter benefit from specific classroom modifications, which teachers can make without calling undue attention to speech difficulties. While the causes of stuttering are still being researched, it is clear that students experience more speech disruptions when internal or external (environmental) demands exceed their capacity to handle the communication situation.



Although individual dynamics vary widely, many students who stutter can report the following phenomena:

- They think about their speech and struggle to control it.
- They view speaking as a performance rather than as a spontaneous act of self-expression.
- They feel rushed to communicate.
- They perceive their listener as impatient or judgmental.
- They place high demands on fluent speech and value perfectionism.
- They develop a self-perspective as a “stutterer.”
- They anticipate and predict moments of struggle and tension in their speech.

Students are more likely to experience easier speech under these conditions:

- When they are comfortable with the listener and believe that both their message will be heard and that stuttering is okay.
- When they feel they have agency over their speech in any given environment.
- When they take initiative and are assertive in their interactions.
- When they are confident about speaking and managing stuttering.
- When they can say what they want to say in all speaking, learning, and social situations.
- When they are tolerant and accepting of their own stuttering.

Accommodations

The Rehabilitation Act of 1974 included a law called Section 504 to protect people from discrimination based on disability. This includes students in public schools. If the student and their family feel the need, they can request a 504 plan. The 504 plan is a formal document that explains how the school and staff will accommodate a student's needs so that the child does not have any unfair advantage.



Reading fluency is often assessed in school-aged children through the collection of a words-correct-per-minute (WCPM) score. This score is obtained by individually assessing students “as they read aloud for one minute from an unpracticed passage of text” (Hasbrouck, 2006). In many cases, this can result in students who stutter being assessed using a scale that taps straight into their most difficult speaking task—speed and fluidity of speech. Obtaining a WCPM score involves individual, oral reading of an unpracticed text. These three factors—individual, oral, and unpracticed—tend to heighten anxiety in students, which can lead to more speech struggle and an increased number of disfluencies, especially for children who stutter (CWS). Thus, CWS may appear to have less reading fluency, when their performance may be heavily influenced by stuttering.

In general, many rubrics for performance include areas related to “fluency” and “timing” of the presentation. Children who stutter may need accommodations to these standard classroom procedures to ensure accurate assessment of performance. These children can be offered alternative silent reading assessments (such as the Test of Silent Work Reading Fluency, or the Test of Silent Contextual Reading Fluency, etc). If students who stutter wish to participate in timed oral reading fluency assessments (many may not want to be singled out), then parents and SLPs can request that the scores received will not be used for reading level placement purposes. Rather, teachers can look at multiple measures of ability such as comprehension scores, and daily work to determine reading level placement. Children who stutter may benefit from being scored on a rubric that does not rely on fluency measures that might be highly impacted by stuttering.

Accommodations (Continued)

The following accommodations are recommended by SAY (Stuttering Association for the Young), and NSA (National Stuttering Association).

- The student will be allowed extra time on any oral presentation or project
- The student will only be called on to speak aloud when their hand is raised.
- The student will be allowed to pass their turn during oral reading or other round-robin speaking activities
- The students will be given alternatives to presenting in front of class (e.g., in private, with a smaller group, or through a video)
- The student will be permitted opportunities to practice before public speaking assignments to reduce anxiety
- The student will be given opportunities to ask the teacher questions in private
- Consider assessing the student on the content they are presenting rather than fluency
- The student's teachers will be educated on how to support children who stutter in the classroom (e.g., by giving them as much time as they need to speak).



It is important to remember to give students reasonable choices and to not assume what they can and cannot do. Some students may not use the accommodations offered to them, but will feel confident knowing that they have them as an option.

My Experience



My English teacher Mrs. West and I, the first teacher to accommodate me

Once I began high school, the activities requiring oral participation increased significantly, so naturally, my need for classroom accommodations did as well. It was not until two years ago that I asked for them and advocated for myself. From kindergarten to freshman year, I was unaware that I was allowed to ask for help. After my current speech therapist, Allegra Ludwig Michael, explained to me that I have every right to ask for help- and that asking for help doesn't make me any less intelligent or capable- I reached out to my teachers. I started practicing my presentations with teachers, receiving extra time on presentations, and speaking only when I raised my hand. Asking for these accommodations has redefined my classroom experience. Now, I can focus, speak, and learn calmly and confidently- I feel as if I have found the voice I had lost as a child. With this newfound voice, I want to increase stuttering awareness, reduce stigmas and myths that exist about stuttering, and to help children who may be experiencing what I felt for so long.

Sources

The Stuttering Association For The Young. “Supporting My Child Who Stutters at School Part 3: 504 Plans and Classroom Accommodations: Say.” Supporting My Child Who Stutters at School Part 3: 504 Plans and Classroom Accommodations | SAY The Stuttering Association for the Young, 2022, <https://www.say.org/supporting-my-child-who-stutters-at-school-part-3-504-plans-and-classroom-accommodations/>.

“Oral Reading Fluency - Home - National Stuttering Association.” TIMED ORAL READING/ PRESENTATIONS & CHILDREN WHO STUTTER , 2014, <https://westutter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Oral-Reading-Fluency-2015.pdf>.

Dunway, Claudia. “Guidelines for Teachers of Students Who Stutter - Think Speak Success.” Guidelines for Teachers of Students Who Stutter, 2011, <https://www.thinkspeaksuccess.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Guidelines-for-Teachers-of-Students-Who-Stutter.pdf>.

More sources & extra information

<https://westutter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Allies.pdf>

<https://www.stutteringhelp.org/teens>

Contact me through my phone number (831-566-4245) or my email cameronmcdaniel@students.mvcs.org with any questions

Thank you :)