

Minimizing Bullying for Children Who Stutter



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I. Disclosures

A. Financial



1. *Overall Assessment of the Speaker's Experience of Stuttering (OASES)*, Pearson Assessments. (Royalties)
2. *School-Age Stuttering Therapy: A Practical Guide and Minimizing Bullying: A Guide for SLPs with workbooks for students, parents, and teachers/administrators*, Stuttering Therapy Resources, Inc. (Royalties/Ownership)

B. Non-financial

Advisory Board, StutterTalk / Volunteer, National Stuttering Association



II. Why Bullying?

A. Bullying is an international problem (Molcho et al., 2009)

1. ~**30%** of students in the USA are bullied, and **15 – 25%** are bullied frequently (Nansel et al. 2001 and others)
2. ~**25%** of all students report being harassed because of differences from other children (Austin et al., 2002)
3. ~**75%** of 8- to 11-year-olds said that bullying occurs at their schools (Kaiser Family Foundation & Nickelodeon, 2001)

B. According to the American Medical Association (cited in Cohn & Canter, 2003)

1. **3.7 million** youths engage in bullying
2. **3.2 million** youths are victims of “moderate” or “serious” bullying

III. “What does that have to do with *stuttering*?”

Bullying can be particularly problematic for children who stutter

A. Bullying and stuttering

1. Children who stutter are more likely to experience bullying than other children (e.g., Blood & Blood, 2007; Mooney & Smith, 1995)
 - a) **59%** of children who stutter report being bullied about their speech (Langevin, Bortnick, Hammer, & Wiebe, 1998)
 - b) **56%** of children who stutter reported being bullied at least once per week (Langevin et al., 1998)
 - c) **75%** of adults who stutter reported that bullying interfered with school work (Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999)

B. Because of their communication difficulties, children who stutter may find it harder to respond directly to bullies – they need help!

IV. What is bullying, anyway?

Understanding bullying is a key first step toward making a difference

A. Bullying is different from teasing (e.g. Tattum, 1989)

1. **Teasing is okay:** Teasing involves harmless “ribbing” or “joking” between family or friends
 - a) Teasing is a way of showing love or good feelings toward others
 - b) Teasing is having fun
 - c) Teasing is not meant to be hurtful
 - d) Teasing is enjoyed by everyone involved in the situation
 - e) If teasing becomes hurtful, it is no longer considered teasing
2. **Bullying is not okay:** Bullying involves a conscious effort on the part of one person (or more) to cause harm to another



- a) Bullying is hurtful
- b) Bullying is an attempt to control someone
- c) Bullying is done to create power for one person and take power away from another person
- d) Bullying is never acceptable
- e) Bullying is something we want to prevent— for all children, not just children who stutter

B. Different kinds of bullying

1. Bullying can occur in different ways...
 - a) Bullying does not only involve physical intimidation or aggression
 - b) It can also involve **verbal comments** (name calling, verbal taunts, insults) that cause a person to feel bad (“psychological bullying”), and actions aimed at creating **social isolation** (“relational bullying”)
2. ...and it can occur in different places
 - a) Bullying does not only take place on the playground
 - b) It can also occur in the classroom, on the bus, over the phone, via the Internet (“cyberbullying”), in the mall, and anywhere else a child interacts with others

V. Who is involved in bullying?

A. Bullying typically involves several people (Coloroso, 2008)

1. **Bully:** the child who is doing the bullying
2. **Bullied:** the child who is being bullied
3. **Bystander:** the other children in the school, situation, or environment
4. A comprehensive management plan must take into account all of these individuals... and all of the locations and situations in which bullying might happen.

B. Why do bullies bully?

1. Many bullies have low self-esteem (Donnellan et al., 2005). (They pick on others to make themselves feel stronger)
2. Some bullies are “popular” kids who have a low tolerance for differences in others (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003). (They pick on others who stand out.)
3. Many bullies lack basic social skills and a sense of empathy or understanding for others



- a) Some may not care about the feelings of other children
- b) Others may thrive on other children’s negative feelings (“need to feed”)



C. Why don't bystanders help? Bystanders may "go along with" the bully

1. When asked, they say they did not mean to cause harm to the child who is being bullied
 - a) They may even be friends with the child who is bullied, but they may be afraid of the bully and unsure about what to do
2. Even when bystanders don't join in with the bullying, their lack of supportive action hurts
 - a) A child who is being bullied may feel isolated when other children don't stand up for him
3. Thus, bystanders can be perceived as either contributing to the problem or contributing to the solution. "Not doing anything" contributes to the problem

VI. What happens when a child is bullied? Bullying make people feel bad

A. Bullies bully people about things that bug them

1. Bullies seek out **differences** between people, then they attack people based on those differences
2. They are not interested in just *any* differences – they are only interested in the differences that **bother** people
3. If a bully tries to pick on someone about something that doesn't bother him, they won't get the **negative reaction** they crave



B. Bullies know what bothers someone based on his *reactions*

1. If a person reacts negatively to the bully's comments, the bully will continue to pick on those differences
2. What if the person could react less negatively?

VII. What happens when a child who stutters is bullied? Bullying makes stuttering worse

A. Bullying makes people feel bad

1. Children who stutter who experienced bullying reported greater anxiety (Blood & Blood, 2007)
2. Children who stutter also reported reduced self-esteem, optimism, and life satisfaction (Blood & Blood, 2004; Blood, Blood, Tramontana, Sylvia, Boyle, & Motzko, 2011)
3. When children who stutter feel bad, they may be more likely to stutter more
 - a) They may stutter more frequently or more severely (with more physical tension and struggle)
 - b) The more severely a child stutters, the more difficult it may be for him to respond verbally



B. Bullying makes stuttering worse

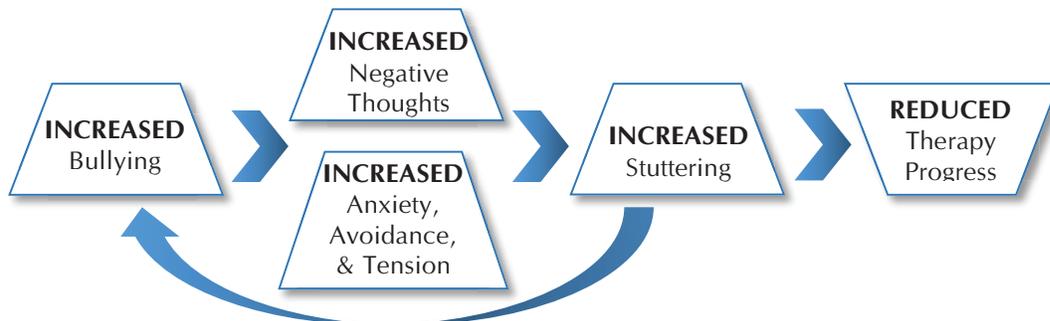
1. Bullying isolates people socially
2. Children who stutter are already at risk for social isolation – bullying exacerbates the separation (Davis, Howell, & Cooke, 2002)

C. Other children may be more likely to become active or passive bystanders

1. Other children's lack of understanding can be traced, in part, to general misconceptions about stuttering and reluctance of many to talk about stuttering
2. Either way, this increases the child's isolation

D. Bullying and stuttering

1. Bullying can increase negative thoughts, anxiety, avoidance and tension
2. This can increase stuttering, which increases bullying even more!
3. All of this can lead to reduced progress in therapy



From Murphy et al. (2013), *Minimizing Bullying for Children Who Stutter*

VIII. SLPs can play a central role in helping children minimize the effects of bullying: 6 Steps for Minimizing Bullying (Murphy, Quesal, Reeves, & Yaruss, 2013)

- A. **Step 1: Teach children about stuttering** to reduce anxiety/ shame and provide foundation for other aspects of therapy
- B. **Step 2: Teach children about bullying** to reduce anxiety/ shame, change attitudes toward bullying, and increase personal power
- C. **Step 3: Help children become less concerned** about stuttering/bullying by increasing self-esteem and personal power through desensitization and cognitive restructuring
- D. **Step 4: Help children learn to respond to bullying** through problem-solving and conflict resolution exercises
- E. **Step 5: Help children educate peers** about stuttering and bullying to develop empathy and reduce social isolation
- F. **Step 6: Teach parents, teachers, and others** about stuttering, therapy, and bullying so they can provide effective support for the child's self-esteem and responses to bullying

IX. Step 3a: Desensitization (e.g., Dell, 2000; Murphy, 1998, 1999; Sheehan, 1970; Van Riper, 1973)

- A. A process for modifying attitudes by diminishing negative feelings about stuttering (or anything that bothers us). Involves *gradually* exposing ourselves to what we fear in a controlled, supportive environment
- B. How can kids overcome their fear of stuttering? **By stuttering!** Of course, they already have, so we need to help them experience stuttering in a way that reduces fear
- C. Some desensitization activities
 1. **Pseudostuttering / voluntary stuttering** to face the feared behavior in a supportive setting
 2. **Teach others how to stutter** and assign letter grades to their performance (fun, empowering)
 3. **Represent stuttering** with models (clay, Legos, etc.) then break up the model to represent regaining power



4. **Draw stuttering** so the child can illustrate for himself and others what the moment of stuttering is like
5. **Play with stuttering** through games where children are rewarded for producing the longest, loudest, or silliest examples of pseudostuttering
6. **Get support** by including children in group therapy and self-help experiences
7. Show children that **they're not alone** by introducing them to famous and not-so-famous people who stutter

X. **Step 3b: Cognitive restructuring** (Beck, 1979, Ellis, 1962, and others, e.g., Rapee, Wignall, Psych, Hudson, & Schniering, 2000)

A. Learning to modify attitudes by “thinking differently” about the problems we face in life

B. Basic premises:

1. how we *think* about something influences how we *feel*
2. Some of our thoughts are worried thoughts...They make us feel **more** scared
3. Some of our thoughts are calmer thoughts...They make us feel **less** scared
4. If we can change our worried thoughts to calmer thoughts, we will feel less scared

C. Children can work to change their thoughts through problem-solving activities

1. **Identify the worried** thoughts behind negative feelings
2. **Gather evidence** about the thoughts
3. **Evaluate** the thoughts based on the **evidence**
4. **Change** the worried thoughts to calm thoughts
5. **Examine the possible consequences** of the feared event



D. Our goal is not to *convince* children to think differently, but to give them the opportunity to evaluate their existing thoughts

1. We encourage children to be detectives, seeking out evidence for/against their thoughts
2. This way, they come to make changes on their own

E. As a child overcomes his fear of stuttering, it will be easier for him to **respond** to bullies in less negative ways. That is, he will be better able to “ignore” the bullying and take actions that will lead to less bullying in the future

XI. **Step 4: Help children respond appropriately to bullying**

A. Bullies crave the negative reactions they get

1. If they don't get those negative reactions from one child, they will seek those negative reactions from another
2. There is nothing we can do through the child who stutters that will help the bully – **he needs help of his own!** (School-wide bullying management programs help bullies, too.)
3. All we can hope to do through the child who stutters is to **redirect** the bully away from talking about stuttering
4. If the child who stutters can say to the bully, “no, that doesn't bother me,” this will help to redirect the bully so he won't keep picking on the child about his stuttering
 - a) This is an example of increasing social competence

- B. Redirecting bullies: Simple, matter-of-fact comments can defuse the situation and show the bully that he's not going to get what he wants
 1. The bully says, "You stutter!" The child who stutters says, "Yeah, you're right."
 2. *What's the bullying going to say next?*
- C. If the bully doesn't get the negative reaction, he will try something/someone else
 1. Of course, he's accustomed to getting a negative reaction from the child who stutters, so he might keep trying for a while...
 2. Your student will need to be prepared to repeat his responses until the bully gets bored and gives up/moves on
- D. The problem is... Verbal responses can be very difficult for children who stutter. They will need our help to learn what to say and how to say it effectively
 1. Role-playing gives the child the opportunity to select and practice different verbal responses
 - a) **Direct role-playing:** the child who stutters plays himself and the SLP plays the bully
 - b) **Reverse role-playing:** the child plays the bully and the SLP plays the child who stutters
- E. In "Let's Make a Movie" (Murphy) you and the child
 1. **Brainstorm** about different responses to bullying
 2. **Write a script** for what the bully might say and how the child might respond
 3. **Act out** different responses to see what might work best
 4. **Practice** responses that help to minimize bullying
- F. Responding appropriately to bullies helps to minimize bullying

XII. Step 5: What about the bystanders? Help children educate peers

- A. Bystanders often go along with the bully
 1. They may be afraid of the bully themselves (They don't want to get picked on next)
 2. They don't understand bullying (They may not know that the bully will pick on them anyway)
 3. They don't understand stuttering (It is a confusing behavior if nobody has told you about it)
- B. We can help bystanders become part of the solution by giving them facts about bullying and stuttering to increase their empathy for the child who stutters.
 1. The more they understand, the more likely they will be to help (or at least, to not hinder)
- C. Some examples of ways to educate peers about stuttering
 1. **Acknowledge stuttering openly** (A key aspect of desensitization)
 2. **Provide information** about communication disorders in general (An important part of a broader tolerance training program)
 3. **Distribute handouts and brochures** about communication (and stuttering) at school (A great activity for BHSM and NSAW)
 4. **Participate in support groups**
 - a) Helps the child remember that he's not alone!
 - b) This helps to reduce social isolation, as well



D. The “Classroom Presentation” (Murphy & Colleagues)

1. A chance for a child to provide information about stuttering directly to his peers
2. To get started...
 - a) Ask the child, “If you could tell your friends anything you wanted to tell them about your speech, what would you tell them?”
 - b) Most children have already thought about this. They have a list of facts in mind they’d like to share
 - c) Brainstorm with them about ways to share these thoughts
 - d) Your students will soon see that the best way for others to learn about stuttering is for them to teach others about stuttering!
3. The more other kids know about stuttering (and bullying), the more likely they are to be **part of the solution** not part of the problem

XIII. Step 6: What about everybody else?

A. Teach parents and others about stuttering

1. Parents, teachers, and administrators can all play an important role in minimizing the impact of bullying – and helping to prevent it
2. Many do not know enough about stuttering to understand the child’s experiences (They may think that stuttering is just a “speech issue”)

B. We (and the child) can help them

1. Help parents understand stuttering and **come to terms** with the fact that their child stutters
2. Help teachers and administrators understand how common bullying is for children who stutter and **how bullying can exacerbate** the stuttering disorder



XIV. Summary: Children *can* overcome the effects of bullying *and* we *can* help!

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