Rhythm and Blues: It’s all in the Timing

November 21, 2016 / Articles

Highly effective therapy exists for preschool-aged children who stutter. If you and your child attend speech pathology sessions, you can “get rid” of the fluency disorder. As an individual grows older however, stuttering becomes harder to treat and must be “managed” rather than “eliminated”. So what do we do with school-aged students? There is a real need to improve treatment options for this “in-between” population. School-aged kids who stutter:

- are more likely to repeat a grade at school than peers
- have increasingly negative attitudes to communication as they progress through school
- are commonly bullied
- have a lower quality of life than peers

Any bullied child is highly likely to experience anxiety. Social anxiety typically appears in early adolescence, so there will probably be signs of it developing during school years.

Does your child feel down about his stuttering? Contact Box Hill Speech Pathology on (03) 9899 5494.

To minimise the social and emotional impacts of stuttering, it’s critical that children who continue to stutter when they start school receive treatment as soon as possible. Historically, speech-restructuring programs (‘Smooth Speech’, ‘Prolonged Speech’, ‘The Camperdown Program’ etc.) have had the most research supporting them. However, there are drawbacks:

- children are unlikely to want to continue using an unnatural speech pattern that could draw attention to them
- it’s common for individuals of all ages to relapse
- treatment was designed to be delivered in an intensive format

One program for school-aged children is syllable-timed speech (STS), based on the principle that speaking each syllable in time to a rhythmic beat reduces stuttering. Speech pathologists and psychologists at the Australian Stuttering Research Centre recently trialled a modified version of STS with children aged 6 – 12 years. They combined the key features of STS with the verbal contingencies (parent responses to stuttered and stutter-free speech) of programs such as the Lidcombe Program to establish and maintain low levels of stuttering. Overall, findings showed improvements in:

- Stuttering severity
- Self-reported stuttering severity
Looking for effective speech therapy for your child who stutters? Call (03) 9899 5494.

As with any study, researchers must declare factors that may have influenced a trial. The authors of this study note the possibility of maturation affecting results. However, they demonstrated promising outcomes from using modified STS with school-aged kids. Similarly, your speech pathologist may also combine elements of different therapies to tailor a program specific to your child’s needs.

Our highly experienced team at Box Hill Speech Pathology Clinic have helped countless families with children who stutter. Vince Borg, principal speech pathologist, has a special interest in this area and offers in-clinic and Skype therapy. Call (03) 9899 5494 to arrange an appointment.

References:


By Nicola Anglin (Speech Pathologist)