

# Rhythm and Blues: It's all in the Timing

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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

- Self-reported **satisfaction** with fluency
- Self-reported **avoidance** of speaking situations
- **Impact** of stuttering

**[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.*



**Image from:** <http://fortemusic.squarespace.com/black-forest/>

**References:**

“Phase II trial of a syllable-timed speech treatment for school-age children who stutter” by Andrews, C., O’Brian, S., Onslow, M., Packman, A., Menzies, R. & Lowe, R in Journal of Fluency Disorders, Vol. 48, 2016.

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