

Children, stuttering and education

We meet parents of children who stutter during information meetings for people who stutter. These parents have experience with types of treatment. They are not satisfied and are searching for a treatment that will stop the stuttering. They say that their child does not wish to be corrected in terms of his/her speech, let alone practice. We did not have any answers to their questions. We discuss stuttering with young people and adults during our information meetings. Adults are themselves responsible for their own stuttering. We, moreover, didn't have any experience with effective treatment during our childhood. We do understand, however, that early supervision is required to prevent someone from having to follow a long series of treatments.

What is a good treatment for young children who stutter because of emotional problems? We have heard from parents that the treatment of children is a reflection of the stuttering therapy used for adults. The opinion is the same, namely that the child must change the way he or she speaks by practicing. The speech exercises are, however, in the form of a game. The question is whether one method will give a child an equal position in society. Does the child learn to solve his or her daily problems during the treatment? Does the child learn to work independently and does he or she learn to be responsible? Will the problem be removed or do we add to the child's problems? Now, the child is viewed by everybody as a child who stutters. If the therapist, parents and teacher believe that the child will continue to stutter, the child will believe this too.

We have experienced in our therapy that equivalence neutralises inability and uncertainty. We submitted our questions to the therapist who applies the principle of equivalence in stuttering therapy.

Which points of view are held by an adult, who treats a child equally?

- A child who stutters is not responsible for solving the problem, instead, the adult is responsible for the emotional state of the child
- Every situation with a child is an educational situation;
- A lower knowledge level is not able to understand a higher knowledge level; the child is incapable of understanding the adult world
- The task of the adult is to put himself or herself in the shoes of the child
- The child is responsible for his or her level of understanding;
- The adult carries out his or her task in such a way that the child can learn from the experience
- The adult teaches the child to cooperate and about community spirit

- If a child can actually do something by himself or herself, then it is not done for him or her: zipping up his/her coat, making and cutting sandwiches, etc.
- Commanding a child does not work because children will not allow themselves to be coerced
- The adult will not stand in the way of the need of the child to cooperate
- The adult cannot take decisions for the child
- You hold a conversation with a child
- You ask children about their ideas, for example, in the family council
- The child feels the mood of the adult: sadness, excitement, anger or serenity, happiness and trust
- The adult deals normally with the child and will not go over the top
- The unequivocal adult with regard to feelings, thoughts and words provides the correct example to the child
- Children live emotionally and their intellectual powers are in development; with their instinctive intelligence they live in the modern era and, with regard to this, they are ahead of us
- We are linked to the spirit of the age where we make an effort with regard to this; there is no room any more for aggression, control or superiority; instinctive and communicative characteristics fit in with our times
- Fathers and mothers are equal
- Children are equivalent to their sisters and brothers, their parents and all adults
- Children have rights and duties
- Mothers, fathers and teachers do not show a preference for one of the children and other adults do not do this either
- Within the family, mothers and fathers make every effort to collaborate and, at school, teachers will make every effort to ensure there is collaboration. Then children will collaborate.

Good treatment of the young child includes parental and teacher supervision. Good treatment will only be apparent to adults and not the child.

- The classroom is the place where stuttering is stopped
- Parents are emotionally involved in the stuttering and unconsciously they impede correct speech
- The teacher is the person designated to observe the child;
- The therapist will teach the teacher to watch the child's behaviour
- The child works on his or her task in the classroom and no attention is paid to the stuttering
- If we direct the attention of the child to his or her way of speaking, this will lead to stuttering
- Stuttering is not a topic for the therapist to discuss with the child and the teacher and the parents cooperate within this context
- Every time the child stutters, he or she will learn to stutter better
- It is not true that the child does not suffer due to the stuttering
- The class that reacts 'normally' accepts that the child stutters and the teacher and the child's peers will allow the child to stutter better

- When the feeling of impotence is removed, the stuttering will stop
- A child who experiences impotence and reluctance when performing his or her task will not learn
- The teacher will offer the task in such a way that the child will learn from the experience
- An event in the classroom will become an interesting experience under the guidance of the teacher

How Sem stops stuttering

Sem, 5 years of age, Year 1

I observe Sem in the classroom without him knowing. The teacher believes that he is a spontaneous child. The only problem is concentration.

A classroom conversation. The children are talking among themselves and with the teacher. The teacher provides her answers to all the children. Sem says: "Miss, have I been given sweets by by by ... given sweets by ... those cards ... I, I, I have put down an eye ... I have, have not tasted one." He continuous to speak and the teacher listens for a longish time. It is not easy to follow what he is saying.

The teacher calls out the first name of a child and that child calls out his/her surname. Sem waits a short time and calls out "Wolters".

The teacher gives the children the opportunity to show off their Santa Claus present. Sem walks from his chair to the teacher and tells her that he has also received one. He wants to be able to see the toys properly. The teacher allows this. Unnoticed, he walks around the classroom and he also goes to the other children. The teacher says something about this. Sem goes back to his place and lies down on the table.

The teacher: "Listen to what we will do next; we will either select a task from the selection board or finish the task we started this morning. Then you can play with the Santa Claus present you brought with you." I do not know whether Sem listens to what was said. The teacher calls out the names: "Marc and Sem." Sem reacts. He chooses from the selection board but puts the picture back in the box. He, therefore, does not choose. He slips behind the Christmas tree. Dave and San are playing with a top and Sem joins in. I ask the teacher whether Sem is working. She says No. After a little while, he, Dave and San drag a box with construction material into the classroom. The teacher says that he must fill in the selection board. He now sticks the picture, that he had previously put back, onto the selection board. They all have their own construction picture. Dave and San talk together about their construction; they are sitting next to each other. Sem is lying on the other side of the box. He is imagining more than he is building and now and again he says something.

Sem is the last one to join the group and he sits next to the Christmas tree. The teacher sits on the other side of the tree and she cannot see everything that Sem does. Sem sits down on the floor. The teacher: "Sem, sit on the chair please." Sem says "Yes" and does as he is told. A moment later the teacher says: "Sem, stay on that chair." Sem sits down again but is irritated. He blows very hard into the ear of the girl sitting next to him. The teacher: "Let's sing a song, three times three is nine." Sem does not join in with the singing. Dave chooses a Santa Claus song. The children put their arms around each other and sway from left to right and sing along. The girl next to Sem wants to put her arm around Sem and sway along but Sem does not want this. He bites and scratches her lightly. He only wants to sit and stand up.

The first question is: What position does Sem take?

- When he tells a story, Sem talks for a long time and he rambles on, sometimes stuttering and sometimes not
- He does it chaotically and noisily
- He moves a lot
- He does not do as he is told by the teacher
- He does not listen
- He is searching for the limits of what the teacher will allow
- He imagines a lot when working with building materials
- He does not talk with others about his work
- He is the last one to join the group
- He teases others when the teacher tells him off
- He refuses to do anything with others
- He wants to choose
- He decides when he does and does not join in

The second question is how the teacher should react to Sem.

- Sem likes to talk and that is an advantage. That he sometimes stutters is a negative experience.
- He fulfils one of his needs by being chaotic and noisy. He withdraws from the teacher's control. His chaos leads to his stuttering.
- Movement is necessary to regulate feelings and to assimilate impressions but noise will not accomplish this.
- When Sem listens to the teacher, a situation in which he feels he is being forced changes into an interesting experience.
- By fantasising, Sem is practising his imaginative powers. He occupies his mind with something.
- He does not talk with others about his work. The teacher can teach him that talking will make the work more interesting. A child who talks about the work develops his language, will have ideas and is not alone.
- When Sem reacts late, he checks what others are doing. He will copy their behaviour or will do the opposite. He does not learn.
- Always being the last one is not good for Sem. The teacher is able to let him react immediately. Sem will then gain new experiences.
- Sem teases a girl after the teacher acts against him. The teasing may reduce the bad feeling that he has about the public reprimand. The teacher can ask for his cooperation instead of correcting his disruptive behaviour.

- Sem rejects the girl and provokes a fight. It is the teacher's task to find a school task for which Sem does wish to have contact.
- During a conversation between equals, the teacher stimulates Sem to be independent in his work. If Sem chooses this, then he is showing that he is independent.

Goals are set for Sem in collaboration with his teacher:

- Working independently
- Putting things into words
- Having a conversation
- Acting calmly
- Working systematically
- Being consistent
- Doing your task cheerfully
- Following the instructions given
- Developing a community spirit

After two months

The teacher has the children sitting in a circle and adds the jumping jack to the circle. If you want to tell us something, then you hold it firmly but, if not, you pass it on to your neighbour. Sem regularly sticks up his finger. When he is speaking for a longer period of time, he repeats words and parts of words. He usually speaks well. If it is his turn in the circle, then he keeps the jumping jack with him and tells the group something. If he leaves his seat, it is because he wishes to see what is going on properly.

After three months

Laura did not bring any fruit with her and the teacher asks the others whether they can spare some of their own. Sem reacts immediately, gives her some of his biscuits and tells her that she can have more. The teacher tells me that: "Robin is new in the class and he likes to play with San."

Robin is sitting at a table and is making a construction with blocks. San is sitting to the right of Robin and Sem is sitting to the right of San. San and Sem are building together. San gets up and continues to work. He is the one leading. Sem fetches material, passes items on and adds a block to the construction but also walks away and checks what other children are doing. He bangs blocks together rhythmically and sings. He slowly becomes noisy. The building with many floors that Robin has made attracts San's and Sem's attention. Robin says: "You are copying me." San competes with Robin. San's and Sem's building collapses while that of Robin remains standing. San starts again. Sem walks around the classroom and makes music with a piece of wood and a block. Sem stays sitting in his chair when eating.

After five months

The children come into the classroom. Sem walks to his table and sits down on his chair. He does not say anything. He touches the little tablecloth in the centre of the table but the girl sitting next to him does not approve. He sighs.

The theme for that week is the fire brigade. The teacher asks: "What are today's day and month and what number does this day have." Sem answers without stuttering. The teacher: "You say your name and a fire brigade word." Sem moves around on his chair. When it is his turn, he says: "Sem, water."

The exercises are discussed with the class and all the children listen. The teacher then continues working with a small group. Sem throws the dice and counts up to five aloud. When he has returned to this chair, he talks to Evy. Sem puts down his five tokens. The teacher asks for a second time: "Which colour?" Sem: "Red." After the explanation, she asks a question about the working method. Sem is also given a turn. He explains. He stutters briefly and then he stops stuttering completely. The teacher places the material on the table for them in a well-organised manner. Sem asks the teacher: "Can I have this one?" The teacher: "You can take whichever one you want." Sem says something about children's parties. Choosing a sticker takes a long time; every time the same. He covers them in glue and does not like them. He dries them with the sponge and puts them back in the box. The teacher: "Sem, please again put your brush on the shelf." He does this. He takes the next series of stickers to the brush and places them on the working surface. He comes to the conclusion that the stickers have too little glue. He takes the brush and adds glue to the task. Dave is walking around in a red long dress and comes to offer Sem food. They talk and shout to each other. Sem walks away from his work and checks where the teacher is. The teacher arrives in the working corner. Sem looks in the doll corner. "Mister Sem, how far have you got?" Sem goes back to work. The teacher sits down with him so that he continues to work. Sem is the only one who has not finished. With an angry face, he taps a few times at his work. He is 10 minutes later than the others. He works well with the teacher next to him. Sem has spoken a lot and well.

After ten months, year 2

Sem is given an assignment with the bead board: putting down a drawing. He tells the teacher that he does not feel like it. The teacher tells him that he should do it anyway and he starts to work. Sem is again at school in the afternoon and he asks the teacher whether he can finish his work with the beads.

After twelve months

Construction material
He shares the box with Guy. Sem talks to Guy and is working.

Sem does not stutter anymore.

