



## How To Get The Best Speech Therapy For Your Child Who Stutters

### *A Guide For Parents from the Specialty Board on Fluency Disorders*

#### **The Challenge**

If your child stutters – or if you think your child may be stuttering – the good news is that speech-language pathologists (SLPs) today know a lot more about stuttering than they did even a few years ago. Considerable progress has been made in working with children who stutter, and many SLPs are doing effective and innovative work.

The challenge for you as a parent is to find a clinician who understands stuttering and is experienced in working with children who stutter. This is a challenge because SLPs are trained as generalists. Even though many clinicians are knowledgeable about stuttering, the majority of SLPs may have had only one course in fluency (stuttering) and very little experience in working with children who stutter.

Because stuttering is a relatively low-incidence disorder, most speech therapists see very few children who stutter and have little opportunity to gain experience. One survey of speech therapists found that:

- Nearly half said they were not comfortable working with children who stutter.
- The majority did not know how to teach most stuttering modification techniques.
- Four out of 10 had not attended a workshop on stuttering since they graduated from college.
- Two-thirds did not know how to contact a fluency specialist for consultation.

This means that you, as a parent, need to take an active role in getting the most expert speech therapy for your child.

#### **Clinician Qualifications**

Certified speech-language pathologists hold a Certificate of Clinical Competence awarded by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). This requires completion of a rigorous training program, passing a national examination and a year of post-graduate supervised work experience. These certification requirements may or may not include working with stuttering.

#### ***Board Recognized Fluency Specialists***

Because some communication disorders merit advanced training and treatment expertise, ASHA established specialty recognition programs to help consumers identify speech pathologists experienced in specific areas. Specialty recognition in fluency -- the treatment of stuttering -- was the first such program approved in 1998. The program is administered under ASHA requirements by the Specialty Board on Fluency Disorders.

*Board Recognized Fluency Specialist* is the designated title for professionals who have been approved by the Specialty Board on Fluency Disorders. These professionals indicate their certification by ASHA as CCC-SLP (Certificate of Clinical Competence-Speech-Language Pathology) and their Specialty Recognition in Fluency Disorders as BRS-FD (Board Recognized Specialist-Fluency Disorders).

In addition to ASHA's Certificate of Clinical Competence, Board Recognized Fluency Specialists must have at least two years of full-time clinical experience, 100 hours of post-graduate educational training in fluency disorders, and 75 hours of supervised clinical practice with persons who stutter. They must submit a portfolio of clinical work for review and approval and pass a national examination on fluency disorders.

In order to maintain Board Recognized Fluency Specialist status, clinicians must obtain 45 hours of continuing education every three years and maintain an active clinical practice in stuttering. Credentials are submitted to the board for review every three years. A current list of specialists is

posted on the board's web site, <http://www.stutteringspecialists.org>

### **Other Clinicians**

Because of the rigorous standards required to achieve and maintain Board Recognized Fluency Specialist status, there are only about 300 specialists in the U.S. However, many other speech-language pathologists are experienced in working with people who stutter and attend continuing education workshops on fluency. Some of these clinicians are working toward specialty recognition under the supervision of a Board Recognized Fluency Mentor. All speech-language pathologists are encouraged to consult with Board Recognized Fluency Specialists for help with their clients who stutter.

### **How To Get The Most Expert Speech Therapy For YOUR Child**

If you do not have access to a Board Recognized Fluency Specialist, it's up to you as a consumer to evaluate the qualifications of speech-language pathologists who may have training and experience in treating stuttering but are not board recognized.

Your child is most likely to get effective therapy when your clinician:

- Has experience with your child's age group
- Has experience with a variety of treatment approaches for stuttering
- Is up-to-date with current developments in stuttering treatment
- Involves families in the process
- Demonstrates knowledge of multi-dimensional assessment procedures covering the affective (feelings), behavioral (outward signs) and cognitive (thoughts) components of stuttering
- Provides treatment goals based on assessment results
- Shows a willingness to modify treatment protocols based upon your child's needs
- Provides solid rationales for treatment methods
- Discusses with you how he/she documents your child's change over time
- Illustrates your child's active involvement in the therapy session
- Designs activities that are age-appropriate and client-centered
- Responds to your child's needs in appropriate ways
- Has a plan for transferring skills to other settings and into real life
- Demonstrates anything he/she asks your child to do
- Handles issues specific to your child, such as negative attitudes about speech, teasing and bullying

If your child's clinician has limited experience with stuttering, you may wish to request a consultation with a Board Recognized Fluency Specialist or, if no specialist is available, with a speech-language pathologist with more experience in treating stuttering.

### **Support Groups**

Support activities are an important supplement to speech therapy. Many children who stutter have never talked about stuttering with other people who stutter. Support activities show them that they are not alone, and that other children and adults have had the same experiences and feelings. National conferences, youth day programs and local support chapters help children, teens and parents develop healthy attitudes about stuttering. The following organizations offer support programs:

- National Stuttering Association, <http://www.westutter.org>
- Friends: The National Association of Young People Who Stutter, <http://www.friendswhostutter.org>