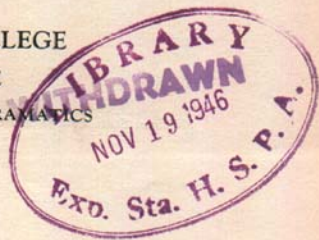


*You Can Aid*  
THE  
STAMMERING CHILD

By Edgar L. DeForest

A simple explanation of the problems of the stammering child and how his parents, teachers and school nurses can aid him to make a better adjustment.

MICHIGAN STATE COLLEGE  
EXTENSION SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF SPEECH AND DRAMATICS  
EAST LANSING



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STAMMERING CHILD



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# You Can Aid the Stammering Child

By EDGAR L. DeFOREST

This bulletin is written with a desire to make known to teachers and parents what they can do to help the child who stammers. A little understanding on the part of parents and teachers can do a great deal in helping the child to make a successful adjustment to his social group and to life in general.

We are living in a complex world—a fast moving world and children are reacting more than we realize to the gigantic upheaval that has taken place. Because we as adults have been upset, owing to these chaotic world conditions, our children have mirrored our feeling in addition to their own difficulties in adjusting themselves to life. These problems have influenced the stammering child and have added to his insecurity.

## STAMMERING DEFINED

The terms stuttering or stammering may be used to describe the same defect—a break in the rhythm of speech. Approximately 1,400,000 stammerers are in the United States alone. There have always been people who have been afflicted this way as far back in history as we can trace. Throughout the many centuries all kinds of cures have been suggested, even to the cutting of the tongue! Many quacks or people who have not had the stammerers' difficulty at heart, but only a desire to make money from them, have flourished.

As teachers and parents we must realize that stammering is not a physical thing in that some of the organs of speech are imperfect. Stammering is the outward sign that some disturbance is going on in the emotional life of the child.

## SITUATIONS TO AVOID

Since tensions in the home and school have an effect on the speech of the child, here are some situations to avoid.

1. Nagging on the part of one or both parents.
2. Favoring one child more than the other.

3. Encouraging excessive rivalry between children.
4. Using too severe discipline in home or school.
5. Expecting of child more than he can do.
6. Allowing child no freedom to express his desires.
7. Dressing the child in a manner different from that of school-mates.
8. Quarreling between parents in the presence of the child.
9. Pointing out child's shortcomings and weak points before others.
10. Using sarcasm and ridicule as a disciplinary measure.

To help counteract the tensions that already exist, the following relaxation exercise will prove invaluable.

#### RELAXATION PROCEDURE

The child reacts to all these things in his environment by tensing the muscles of his body. By tensing the diaphragm, a broad muscle that separates the abdominal cavity from the chest, he interferes with his breathing and soon tries to talk when he has no air supply in his lungs.

Before any lessening of the stammer takes place, all tightness and tenseness of muscles must be reduced. If it is possible, have the stammerer lie down for a short period each day and at this time suggest to him the idea of relaxing his whole body. Saying the word "relax" is not enough. The teacher or parent must show the child how to let his muscles "go" one by one. The teacher or school nurse can do a great deal for the mental poise of the child by showing him that as he frees his body of this tense, tight feeling his speech will come easily.

Have the child lie down flat and as he lies there suggest to him that he does not have to do anything to hold himself up—that he can sink down into the cot. Next, tell him that you are going to show him a way of talking that will be just as easy as lying down and that all he has to do is to "let go" all his muscles and the words will pour out as freely and easily as his air comes out. Explain to him that many times his muscles get tense when he is in a difficult situation and that this prevents his words from pouring out easily because too many muscles get in the way. Tell him that this interferes with the easy outpouring of breath which would carry his words out easily. Because his muscles are not obeying him and because this is very necessary for easy speech,

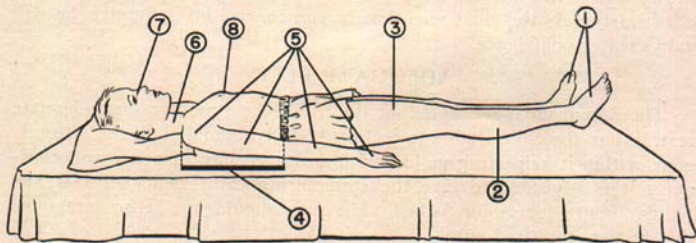
as it is for athletics, tell him that you will show him how to get control of all his muscles. You then suggest that he can make them do what he wants them to do if he knows exactly how they feel when they are tense and then the free, easy feeling when they are relaxed.

### STEPS DESCRIBED

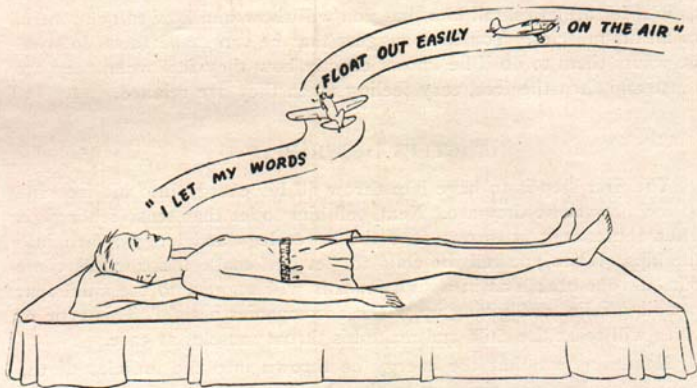
The first step is to have him throw all his energy into his feet and to feel how tense they are. Next, tell him to let that tense feeling go. Then the energy is thrown into the lower legs and let go; then into the hips. When you tell the child to "let go," make those words come out on your breath as in a sigh for this will suggest to the child that complete relief and giving up which accompanies a sigh. This type of voice will relax the child and make his throat muscles at ease.

Next, suggest that the energy be thrown into the muscles of the back from the spine right up to the shoulder blades, and then tell the child to suddenly "let go" that tight feeling. The shoulders, upper arms, lower arms, hands and fingers follow. Then the muscles of the neck. Suggest to the child that he try to yawn and rest all these muscles so that they will permit the throat to be wide open to let his words pour out on his breath. The tension is next thrown into the face and let go, and finally you have the child concentrate on the idea of stillness. Ask him in what place out of doors he feels the most free and easy and then tell him to picture in his mind that he is there. Now that he is relaxed, have him sigh a few times and show him that the air moves out so easily that soon he is going to learn to let his words out on this smoothly flowing breath.

The following chart points out the areas that are to be relaxed.



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Muscles of feet                              | 5. Shoulders, upper arms, lower arms, hands, fingers |
| 2. Muscles of lower leg                         | 6. Muscles of neck                                   |
| 3. Upper leg and thighs                         | 7. Facial muscles                                    |
| 4. Muscles from tip of spine to shoulder blades | 8. Heart region in chest                             |



As the child sighs and feels how easily the breath comes out when he is relaxed, tell him that he can give a free ride to all his words and not have to work so hard hereafter to get them out. You might suggest that when he is relaxed this way his words will fly out as easily as planes in the air. Why pull words out with a team of oxen when we live in an air age!

A great deal of security must be built up in the child from the start so that he will know that as he practices letting go and taking things easy his words will float out easily on the air without any struggle on his part.

Take a simple poem and break it up into short phrases and have the child make a long pause between each part. Have him take in a deep breath and then let the phrase out on that outgoing breath easily and effortlessly. As the child sees that he can control his struggles, he will gain greater confidence.

#### ADEQUATE REST

The parent must see to it that the child who stammers has adequate rest. When the child is able to feel his body relaxed and all the struggle gone within it helps to give his mind a new feeling of peace and courage. It is advisable to give the stammering child plenty of rest and regular hours for going to bed. His play should not be so strenuous that he gets too tired out.

#### CLASS WORK

Should the stammerer recite in class? This can best be determined by the teacher. Certainly no one would think of throwing a person who couldn't swim into deep water and say "go to it!" The stammerer

is in much the same position so that he is not helped merely by being submitted to speech. The teacher should try first of all to see that the child is not kept over-tense. Second, help the child to learn in some measure to reduce the tension in muscles. Third, build up his self-respect and self-confidence to the point where he will want to contribute to the class work. After this, the child should volunteer to recite so that he is taking an active part in the group and is not pointed out as "different."

The teacher can help the stammerer at school by seeing that many "strains" are reduced, such as not making the child give a talk before the class when he is not adequately prepared. The teacher can make certain that the class room is a pleasant place and that she does not expect too much of this student who is working under tension much of the time.

Many times stammerers push themselves into speaking situations when they are not ready to meet such a difficult task. The normal speaker knows how tense and nervous he gets when called upon to speak so that one can readily see how much more tension results in the stammerer.

Learning to talk is a complicated process. In the beginning when a child is learning speech his thoughts are ahead of his muscles, for he cannot quite put into words quickly enough the thoughts that come tumbling to him. The writer has noticed in his own children temporary stammering during this period of learning speech. During this learning period if the child is worried or has any fears slight stammering takes place. Because the child is upset inside it shows in the speech which gives warning that all is not well in his emotional life.

### BANISHING PROBLEMS

A teacher or parent can play a great part in finding out some of the little troubles that loom so big in the life of a child and by a little understanding can help diminish what might be a big problem for the child.

One thing that is very important, and which parents and teachers can control, is the ridicule that sometimes is directed to the stammerer. Teachers can suggest to the class better ways of reacting. Parents can get their other children to cease teasing the stammerer.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS

Most stammerers try to force their words out by using a lot of muscular energy and by doing this they tire themselves out very easily which in turn sometimes makes their stammering worse.

Teachers and parents can help reduce the strain in many ways, such as:

1. By speaking in a calm voice.
2. By building up the child's self-confidence.
3. By telling him that there is nothing wrong with his speech organs.
4. By telling him and by showing him that relaxed muscles will bring easy speech.

By speaking in a calm voice the teacher and parent are suggesting the kind of response they want. Many times the loud, harsh voice only causes the stammerer to tense his muscles more and to increase his fears and anxieties.

The teacher who has a music class can often include types of music that induce the feeling of calmness and peacefulness. Today in our busy world there is need for all of us, adults as well as children, to have some moments of quiet in which the body and mind can be freed of tensions. The art teacher can provide work that will help the child release tensions.

To parents and teachers I would strongly advise against saying to the child, "Stop your stammering. Think before you speak!" If the stammerer could he would. The fear of stammering and the confusion within make these blockings beyond his control, due to his tense condition. The teacher can do much, as can the parent, to promote slower speech by asking all questions in a calm voice. This will suggest to the child the appropriate way to answer.

Ordinarily, a child will not outgrow a stammer so that much must be done to help him better adjust to life situations every day. Parents and teachers should endeavor to exhibit calmness in their own manner, for excitability and impatience is contagious to the stammerer.

### BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Get the child's confidence. Here intuition may be of more help than anything else. Help the child to overcome the following feeling which many stammerers have.

1. **INFERIORITY.** To overcome this, the child must be literally bombarded with feelings of confidence. The skillful teacher or parent should be alert when to apply praise for some good piece of work. Remember, you must be sincere, for the child knows whether he has done well.

2. **DISCOURAGEMENT.** Show the child how many of our greatest men and women in the world have overcome great obstacles. This helps the child to feel that he is not alone in his problem and that others with effort have overcome their defect.

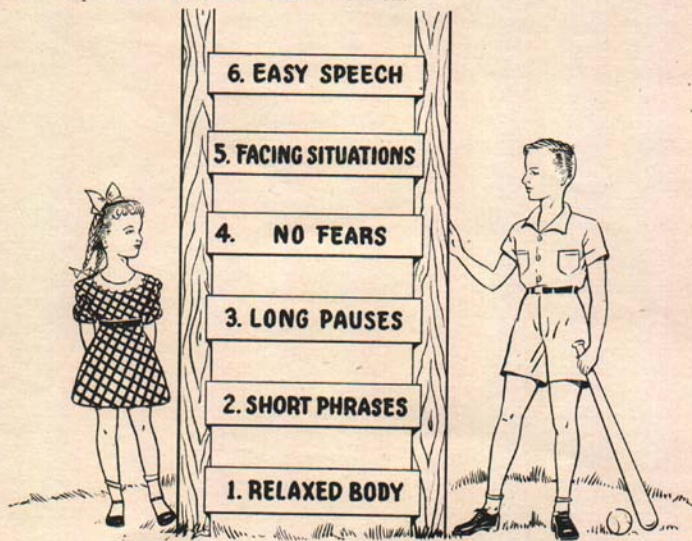


3. **SELF-RELIANCE.** Try to prepare situations in which the child can experience success so that he will build up the poise which will help him face the many difficult situations that he will encounter.

4. **FEAR OF FAILURE.** Stammering IS curable and the child must be given that feeling from the start.

The teacher and parent can help the child to adjust to community affairs, for the child who tries to hide his stammer will only increase it more. As the child learns to do for others he will be freed from his own feelings of inferiority and self-pity.

Always be patient with the stammerer and give him a chance to say what he is so desperately trying to get out. He is nervous and sensitive and your impatience only throws him into more of a panic. By having a conference with the child the teacher can do much in her sympathetic effort to understand him. If the teacher has not had specific speech training—that is, training in psychology and understanding of emotional disorders—she can at least provide for the child a pleasant environment while he is at school, an environment that is free from tension. The teacher can help to give the child a feeling of personal worth and an unshakable confidence that will help not only in school, but in the days ahead when he must take his place in a world that depends on effective communication.



*Stammerers' Ladder to Success.*

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