

Relaxing the Stutter

Once students have developed the ability to catch their stuttering reliably, we want to show them that they are able to change the level of physical tension.

Relaxing the Stutter
(also known as
“Negative Practice”)
does just that.

It involves having
students intentionally
stutter on a word,
carefully observe the
disfluency, and then
repeat the word with
decreased tension.



This gives children a structured opportunity to identify, analyze, and change their stuttering. It shows students that they can work with their speech and stutter more easily.

Relaxing the Stutter also reduces sensitivity to stuttering by providing a safe way to move toward and explore disfluent speech (Gregory, 1989). It increases feelings of control and openness, and prepares children to effectively manage their stuttering in settings outside the therapy room.

Relaxing the Stutter can be taught in the following way:

1. Explain the rationale (described above and on page 9 of the Student Workbook).
2. Preview steps 1–3 of “How to practice Relaxing the Stutter” with your students (see pages 9–10 of the Student Workbook).
3. Model Relaxing the Stutter.
 - » First, stutter on a word from page 11 of the Student Workbook with 100% tension. (You can produce a block, prolongation, or repetition.)

- » Describe to the student the type of disfluency, where the tension is located in your body, what is happening during the disfluency, and how it feels.
 - » Stutter again on the same word, this time reduce the tension by 50%. Depending on the nature of the disfluency, this may involve adding breath support, slowing the production, decreasing articulatory pressure, and/or changing the type of disfluency (e.g., changing a block to a repetition).
 - » Again, describe the type of disfluency, the physical tension, and how it feels.
4. Model the 100% and 50% tension levels again, this time *without* describing the disfluency.
- » Leave three to four seconds between stutters, giving time to fully release the tension from the 100% production before initiating the 50% production.
5. Remind students that as they practice Relaxing the Stutter, they should try to purposefully stutter in their typical manner.
6. Guide students as they follow your model while practicing the words listed on page 11 of the Student Workbook.
- » Encourage students to “stay present with” the disfluency and pay close attention to what is happening in their bodies.
 - » Occasionally ask students to temporarily hold on to the moment of stuttering. This will give them more time to examine sensations of muscular tension. (At first students may find this to be somewhat uncomfortable. However, desensitization occurs as they practice and it becomes easier overtime.)

7. As students practice Relaxing the Stutter, elicit *behaviorally specific* answers by asking questions such as “How did it feel?” “Where was the tension?” “What kind of disfluency was it?” and “How did you decrease the tension?”
 - » Positively reinforce all productions with comments such as “Excellent stuttering,” “Great. You really stuttered with 100% tension,” and “I like the way you decreased the tightness in your... (chest, jaw, tongue, lips, etc).”
8. Ask students to try Relaxing the Stutter with words that they choose.
 - » Have them produce a variety of different types of disfluencies. However, be sure to spend ample time having students stutter in their most typical way.
9. After students master changing tension levels from 100% to 50%, model, and have students practice reducing the tension further (i.e., 100% – 50% – 25%).
 - » Highlight the fact that students are able to actively *change* the level of tension as they stutter.
 - » Remind them that while this technique is practiced only in the therapy room, eventually they will use similar techniques when they truly stutter in non-therapy settings.

A/V Resources for Relaxing the Stutter

Audio Files

[Track 1.4](#): Relaxing the Stutter [0:30]

[Track 1.5](#): How to practice Relaxing the Stutter [2:58]

Video Files

[V14](#) Therapist Instruction [1:20]

[V05](#) Student Example #1: Workbook Words [2:43]

[V12](#) Student Example #2: Game Activity [1:21]

[V11](#) Student Example #3: Words from Text [1:22]

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