

Creating a Stutter-Friendly Virtual Learning Environment

Classroom settings can often be a site of stress and obstacles for children who stutter. Concerns that students may have about being given the opportunity and time to speak may be amplified as classes move online. Additionally, outside stress and the change in routine might make this time an exceptionally difficult one for students to manage their stuttering. Here are some ways that you, as teachers, can make your virtual classroom an accommodating learning environment.

- If your student who stutters seems to be having a harder time communicating than usual, it may be appropriate to check in with them and ask how their needs may have changed, but this is not the right time to expect them to use new speech techniques or behaviors. Think in terms of what you—as a listener—can do to make it easier for your student to communicate instead of expecting drastic changes from them as speakers.
- Right now, focus on meeting students where they are at rather than introducing new stresses in an already more stressful time. If a student who usually participates in class decides they aren't comfortable with giving presentations or being called on, be patient with them and help them find other ways to participate in the learning community.
- Often people who stutter experience prolonged silences called blocks when speaking. Since Zoom relies on sound to register when someone is talking and give them the screen, it might be harder than usual for a student who stutters to get a word in. Consider using the [hand-raising](#) feature on Zoom as a way to ensure fairer turn-taking and to make sure every student has a chance to be heard.
- Staying connected is more important now than ever, but the options for staying connected such as phone calls and FaceTime are often the mediums in which it's hardest for students who stutter to speak. Consider supplementing video instruction with other mediums for informal classroom conversations such as forum posts or threads as a way of providing low-stress outlets for students to stay in touch with classmates.
- For all students—whether or not they stutter—remote learning and virtual classrooms offer new obstacles that get in the way of communication. Sound quality, internet connectivity problems, and chaotic households all make it harder than usual for us to understand each other. Talk to your class about these challenges, and come up with solutions together about ways you can all listen to each other more compassionately. Know that it's okay to ask students to repeat themselves. The most important thing for you to communicate to students who do and do not stutter is that you care about what they have to say. Intentionally creating spaces where everyone has what they need to feel heard does just that.

This isn't an easy time to be a teacher, and FRIENDS would like to thank every teacher who is being flexible and patient in finding new ways to show up for and support their students during these difficult times. For more information and resources about stuttering, visit our website below.