FLUENCY IMPAIRMENT GUIDELINES

Federal Definition of a Fluency Disorder:

Stuttering is primarily characterized by repetitions (sounds, syllables, part words, whole words, and phrases), pauses, and prolongations that differ in number and severity from those of normally fluent individuals. The onset usually occurs during the time that language skills are developing, and onset is generally gradual in nature. Secondary characteristics are frequently evident, and these vary in type and severity from individual to individual. The disfluencies may interfere with intelligibility, social communication, and/or academic and vocational achievement.

Level/Condition/Educational Impact:

A Mild Fluency Impairment is characterized by:
- Disfluencies are transitory and characterized by easy repetitions, prolongations, and some hesitations that compromise 4-5% disfluent speech. Blocking, if it occurs, is less than a full second. Tension is noticeable but disfluencies and tensions are not distracting to the listener. Student does not usually avoid speaking situations and participates in oral language activities. Student’s verbal participation in educational activities may occasionally be limited by self-consciousness about listener reactions to his/her speech.

A Moderate Fluency Impairment is characterized by:
- Disfluencies are frequent and characterized by repetitions, prolongations and some hesitations/interjections, and blocking that compromise 5-9% disfluent speech. Tension is noticeable, distracting to the listener. Associated behaviors, such as grimacing, and other distracting behaviors may be evident during speaking situations. Student is aware of disfluent speech and avoids some speaking situations and oral language activities. Student’s verbal participation in educational activities is impacted by self-consciousness about listener reactions to his/her speech.

A Severe Fluency Impairment is characterized by:
- Disfluencies are habitual and are characterized by repetitions, prolongations, hesitations/interjections, and blocking that lasts 3 or more seconds. Disfluencies comprise greater than 9% disfluent speech. There is evidence of significant vocal tension, some noticeable tremors, and noticeable associated behaviors that are distracting to the listener. Student generally avoids speaking situations and oral language activities. Student’s verbal participation in educational activities is significantly impacted by self-consciousness about listener reactions to his/her speech.

Considerations:

The following measures are appropriate for use in determining the presence of a stuttering impairment:
- Speech sample
- Total disfluency index of the types and number of disfluencies and secondary characteristics obtained in the language sample and a structured reading activity
- Multiple environments/listeners
- Structured observation
- Anecdotal records – impact of disfluencies on oral/expressive language tasks
- Standardized tests
- Teacher report, interview, or checklist
- Student report, interview or checklist
- Parent report, interview or checklist

Note: Teacher, student, and parent reports, interviews, and checklists are not sufficient evidence by themselves and must be supported with additional data.

Best Practice:

An assessment for a fluency disorder should include the following components:
- Background: a history of the development of the student’s stuttering, family history of stuttering, etc.;
- Communication abilities: a report of his/her skills in the five parameters of communication – stuttering, articulation, voice, language, and hearing;
Oral-peripheral examination: a description of any atypical structures and the functional abilities of the oral
mechanism;
• Reports, interviews, checklists: completed by the parents, the student, and the teacher;
• Structured observation: observation of student’s speech and language during oral language activities in the
classroom/school environment;
• Age of student; and/or,
• Length of time disfluent speech pattern has been present.

Fluency Rating Scale

The stuttering rating scale uses the following terminology:
• Description of disfluency addresses the duration of pauses (from less than 1 second to more than 3 seconds) and
number of repetitions.
• Associated non-verbal behaviors means the presence of facial grimaces; visible tension of the head, neck, jaw,
and/or shoulders; audible tension, as noted in uneven stress, pitch changes, increased rate, or tension during
inhalation or exhalation.

Criteria:

The team shall determine that a student is eligible for special education services in the area of Fluency Impairment when
a student’s total score on the ND Guidelines Fluency Severity Rating Scale indicates a Moderate (7-10 points) or Severe
(11-15 points) level impairment. Contributing factors to the scale’s total scores include: frequency of disfluency,
description of disfluency, secondary characteristics, avoidance, and educational impact.

Frequency of Disfluency
• Less than 4% disfluencies – (0 pts.)
• 4% disfluencies – (1 pt.)
• 5-9% disfluencies – (2 pts.)
• 10% or more disfluencies – (3 pts.)

Description of Disfluency
• Primarily whole multi-syllable word repetitions. Occasional whole-word interjections and phrase/sentence
revisions. Less than 1 second pauses OR less than 4 repetitions – (0 pts.)
• Transitory dysfluencies in specific speaking situations which may include repetitions, prolongations, blocks,
hesitations or interjections, and vocal tension. 1 second pauses OR 4 repetitions – (1 pt.)
• Frequent disfluencies in many speaking situations which may include repetitions, prolongations, blocks in which
sounds and airflow are shut off, hesitations or interjections and vocal tension – 2 second pauses OR 5 repetitions
– (2 pts.)
• Habitual disfluencies in a majority of speaking situations, which may include repetitions, associated prolongations,
blocks (long and tense with some noticeable tremors), hesitations or interjections, and vocal tension. 3 or more
second pauses OR 6 or more repetitions – (3 pts.)

Secondary Characteristics
• No associated behaviors – (0 pts.)
• One or more associated behaviors that are noticeable and distracting and occurs inconsistently – (1 pt.)
• One associated behavior that is noticeable and distracting and occurs consistently – (2 pts.)
• Two or more associated behaviors that are noticeable and distracting and occur consistently – (3 pts.)

Avoidance (rate for children 7 and older)
• Does not avoid speaking situations – (0 pts.)
• Occasionally avoids speaking situations – (1 pt.)
• Avoids specific speaking situations (e.g., presentations, phone) – (2 pts.)
• Avoids many speaking situations – (3 pts.)
Educational Impact

- Fluency skills are adequate for the student’s participation in educational settings – (0 pts.)
- Disfluencies are noticeable and in some situations limit the student’s verbal participation in educational settings – (1 pt.)
- Disfluencies are having an impact on the student’s ability to speak and verbally participate in educational settings – (2 pts.)
- Disfluencies are having a significant impact on the student’s ability to speak and verbally participate in educational settings – (3 pts.)

Educational Impact:

The impact of the disability requires specialized instruction as it has an adverse impact on educational performance and is not able to be provided by general education.