

Syllable-Timed Speech Technique

(Also Called the Westmead Program or the Robot Speech Technique)

Syllable-timed speech is a technique that, when practiced every day, can help school-age children decrease their stuttering by 87% over nine months. It capitalizes on rhythm's ability to induce fluent speech.

How to Do It

1. Start by looking at pictures with your client who stutters and talk about what you see.

2. As both of you talk, say one syllable at a time, breaking up your words into syllables and putting a brief boundary or pause after every one:

So instead of talking like this.

Talk. like. this, break. ing. each. word. up. in. to. its. syll. a. bles. and. pu. tting. bound. aries. a. round. each. one.

Try it: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

3. If it's hard for your client to do this easily, have them tap their leg or the table for every syllable.

Try it: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

4. As they gain proficiency, move from very structured tasks like picture description to play to everyday conversation.

You might think this'll feel very strange. It does feel slightly weird at first, but it'll sound more normal if you use your normal inflection and speak as close to your normal speed, simply adding definite boundaries around each syllable.

The Phase I clinical trials found that children aged 6-12-years-old who practiced syllable-timed speech in conversation for 5-10 minutes four to six times per day for 9-12 months reduced their stuttering by up to 87%.

The same kind of results haven't been seen in adults, though, likely because their brain's speech systems are already hard-wired and not as easy to change as children's, but preschool and school-aged children up to age 12 have been shown to benefit.

Practice

Level 1

Look at the pictures in a book and say one sentence using syllable-timed speech.

Try it: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Level 2

Look at the pictures in a book and say two sentences using syllable-timed speech.

Try it: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Level 3

Look at the pictures in a book and say three sentences using syllable-timed speech.

Try it: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Level 4

Look at the pictures in a book and say five sentences using syllable-timed speech.

Try it: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Level 5

Look at the pictures in a book and talk about them for 3 minutes using syllable-timed speech.

Try it: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Level 6

Look at or read a book for 5 minutes using syllable-timed speech.

Try it: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Level 7

Do a fun activity or play with toys for 3 minutes using syllable-timed speech.

Try it: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Level 8

Do a fun activity or play with toys for 5 minutes using the syllable-timed speech technique.

Try it: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Level 9

Have a normal conversation about anything for 5 minutes using the syllable-timed speech technique.

Try it: ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

References

Andrews, C., O'Brian, S., Harrison, E., Onslow, M., Packman, A., & Menzies, R. (2012). Syllable-timed speech treatment for school-age children who stutter: A phase I trial. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*.