



If You Think Your Child Is Stuttering

Is your child stuttering?

If your child has difficulty speaking and tends to hesitate on or repeat certain syllables, words, or phrases, he may have a stuttering problem. But he may simply be going through periods of normal disfluency that most children experience as they learn to speak. This information will help you understand the difference between stuttering and normal language development.

The normal disfluent child

The normally disfluent child occasionally repeats syllables or words once or twice, li-li-like this. Disfluencies may also include hesitations and the use of fillers such as “uh,” “er,” “um.” Disfluencies occur most often between ages one and one-half to five years, and they tend to come and go. There are usually signs that a child is learning to use language in new ways. If disfluencies disappear for several weeks, then return, the child may just be going through another stage of learning.

The child with milder stuttering

1. A child with milder stuttering repeats sounds more than twice, li-li-li-li-like this. Tension and struggle may be evident in the facial muscles, especially around the mouth.
2. The pitch of the voice may rise with repetitions, and occasionally the child will experience a “block” - no airflow or voice for several seconds.
3. Try to model slow and relaxed speech when talking with your child, and encourage other family members to do the same. Don't speak so slowly that it sounds abnormal, but keep it unhurried, with many pauses. Television's Mr. Rogers is a good example of this style of speech.
4. Slow and relaxed speech can be the most effective when combined with some time each day for the child to have one parent's undivided attention. A few minutes can be set aside at a regular time when you are doing nothing else but listening to your child talk about whatever is on his mind.
5. When your child talks to you or asks you a question, try to **pause** a second or so before you answer. This will help make talking to your child less hurried, more relaxed.
6. Try not to be upset or annoyed when stuttering increases. Your child is doing his best as he copes with learning many new skills all at the same time. Your patient, accepting attitude will help him immensely.
7. Effortless repetitions or prolongations of sounds are the healthiest form of stuttering. Anything that helps your child stutter like this instead of stuttering tensely or avoiding words is helping.
8. If your child is frustrated or upset at times when his stuttering is worse, give him reassurance. Some children respond well to hearing, “I know it's hard to talk at times...but lots of people get stuck on words...it's okay.” Often children are most reassured by a touch or a hug when they seem frustrated.
9. Disfluencies may come and go but are now present more often than absent.

The child with more severe stuttering

1. If your child stutters on more than 10% of his speech, stutters with considerable effort and tension, or avoids stuttering by changing words and using extra sounds to get started, he will profit from having therapy with a specialist in stuttering. Complete blocks of speech are more common than repetitions or prolongations. Disfluencies tend to be present in most speaking situations now.
2. The Stuttering Foundation of America at 1-800-992-9392 and www.stutteringhelp.org will provide you with the names of speech-language pathologists who specialize in stuttering, or you may contact a nearby university or hospital clinic for referral assistance. Seek out a speech and language pathologist who has a Certificate of Clinical Competence from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.
3. The suggestions for parents of a child with mild stuttering are also appropriate when the child has a severe problem. Try to remember that slowing and relaxing *your own speaking style* is far more helpful than telling the child to slow down.
4. Encourage your child to talk to you about his stuttering. Show patience and acceptance as you discuss it. Overcoming stuttering is often more a matter of losing fear of stuttering than a matter of trying harder.

Tips for talking with your child

1. Speak with your child in an unhurried way, pausing frequently. Wait a few seconds after your child finishes speaking before you begin to speak. Your own slow, relaxed speech will be far more effective than any criticism or advice such as “slow down” or “try it again slowly.”
2. Reduce the number of questions you ask your child. Children speak more freely if they are expressing their own ideas rather than answering an adult’s questions. Instead of asking questions, simply comment on what your child has said, thereby letting him know you heard him.
3. Use your facial expressions and other body language to convey to your child, when she stutters, that you are listening to the content of her message and not to how she’s talking.
4. Set aside a few minutes at a regular time each day when you can give your undivided attention to your child. During this time, let the child choose what he would like to do. Let him direct you in activities and decide himself whether to talk or not. When you talk during this special time, use slow, calm, and relaxed speech, with plenty of pauses. This quiet, calm time can be a confidence-builder for younger children, serving to let them know that a parent enjoys their company. As the child gets older, it can serve as a time when the child feels comfortable talking about his feelings and experiences with a parent.
5. Help all members of the family learn to take turns talking and listening. Children, especially those who stutter, find it much easier to talk when there are few interruptions and they have the listeners’ attention.
6. Observe the way you interact with your child. Try to increase those times that give your child the message that you are listening to her and she has plenty of time to talk. Try to decrease criticisms, rapid speech patterns, interruptions, and questions.
7. Above all, convey that you accept your child as he is. Your own slower, more relaxed speech and the things you do to help build his confidence as a speaker are likely to increase his fluency and diminish his stuttering. The most powerful force, however, will be your support of him whether he stutters or not.