

B: Communication Disorders

STUTTERING: How to help Your Child

What is stuttering?

Stuttering is a communication disorder affecting the flow of speech. Speech flow may be broken by repeating sounds li-li-like this, prolonging a sound l-----like this, or stopping a sound or syllable completely. Unusual movements of the face or body might also be a part of a person's stuttering pattern. Stuttering is also called stammering.

It is important to know that not all repetitions or breaks in speech are stuttering. We all have breaks in the flow of our speech. We might pause while thinking of something to say, repeat a phrase or a word, start to say something and then stop and change it to something else. These typical disfluencies are not stuttering. Stuttering is when there are involuntary and abnormal repetitions, prolongations, and silent pauses in a person's speech.

How do I know if my child is starting to stutter?

Most children go through a period of poor speech fluency during the time that speech and language skills are developing. Sometimes the number of repetitions, prolongations and silent pauses in a child's speech sounds like stuttering. In such cases, it can be difficult to know for sure if a child's difficulty with fluency is a sign of stuttering or not. It is best to seek the advice of a speech-language pathologist as soon as possible.

Warning signs of stuttering:

- Repeats a sound in a word or a word in a phrase
- Prolongs a sound in a word
- Speech seems to get stuck so child can't get the next sound out
- The child shows signs of struggling to get speech out such as pinching of the lips or cheeks, wrinkling of the eyebrows, frowning, making body movements
- Speech bursts out after a pause (or after getting stuck)
- The disfluencies begin after the age of 3 years
- The disfluencies go on for more than 3 months
- Some of the stutters seem very severe and last for several seconds
- The child expresses concern about their difficulty speaking
- Someone in the child's extended family also stutters

Can stuttering be treated?

Yes! Early intervention can be very effective, so it is important to seek the advice of a speech-language pathologist as soon as possible. Treatment can be helpful for individuals of all ages who stutter.

Strategies for helping someone who stutters:

- Focus on what your child is saying not the stuttering behaviour.
- Avoid making suggestions like 'slow down' or 'take a breath' or 'start again'. These directions are difficult for your child to understand and follow, and may not be helpful for your child.
- Create opportunities to talk that are relaxed, fun, and enjoyable
- Reduce the distractions going on while talking to your child (e.g., turn off the TV)
- Keep your own talking slow and relaxed
- If your child asks questions about their speech getting stuck, say that it happens to everyone once in a while. You can also tell your child that they are going to see a speech-language pathologist who is a specialist in talking.

Where to look for more help:

- The Stuttering Foundation (stutteringhelp.org)
- SAY - The Stuttering Association for the Young (Say.org)
- SSI – The Speech and Stuttering Institute (<https://www.speechandstuttering.com/>)

NOTE: OAFCCD recommends that you seek the advice of a Speech-Language Pathologist to get further information and advice that is specific to your child.