

Fluency Difficulties

Between the ages of two and five years, it is normal for a child to repeat words and phrases, and hesitate a little when working out what to say next.

However, about five in every hundred children stammer for a time when they are learning to talk. Many find it easier to talk fluently as they get older. Others continue to find talking difficult and often get stuck.

If you are concerned about your child's speech you should arrange to see a speech and language therapist who can show you how to help your child.

What is stammering speech?

You may notice your child

- is putting extra effort into saying his words
- has tense and jerky speech
- cannot seem to get started, no sound comes out for several seconds ("... I got a teddy")
- is stretching sounds in a word ("I want a ssstory")
- is repeating parts of words several times ("mu-mu-mu-mu-mummy")
- stops what he is saying half way through his sentence.

(from the British Stammering Association website, 19TH August 2011)

How to Help

- The aim is mainly to reduce any pressure your child may feel in everyday communicative situations. Try to take these points into consideration whenever you are talking to your child.
- Listen patiently to what your child says and respond to the content rather than any dysfluency that may have been present.
- Maintain natural eye-contact when your child is talking.
- Moving down to a level face-to-face with your child can remove any pressures felt by talking to someone much taller than themselves.

- Avoid finishing off your child's sentences when they get stuck, or interrupting midway. It is beneficial for your child to voice their own thoughts.
- Reduce the amount of questions you ask. When you do ask questions, try to ask one at a time and allow plenty time for your child to answer fully.
- Provide a good role model. Talking in a calmer, slower and more relaxed manner can have a greater impact on your child's speech rate than asking them to slow down.
- It is important to note that dysfluency can be a typical development phase.
- Encourage everyone to take an *equal* role in conversation.

Things to avoid

- Finishing your child's sentences for them.
- Rushing them to finish talking.
- Interrupting
- Talking to the child in a hurried way.
- Asking too many questions.
- Correcting the way they have said words or sentences. Instead repeat it back to them once they have finished speaking. For example:

CHILD: "I drew a picture for you"

ADULT: "Oh, you drew a picture for me!"