



Dysfluency

Dysfluency is also known as stammering or stuttering. Research indicates that stammering is a neurological condition. Stammering can often run in families, where around 60% of people who stammer have a relative who stammers or used to stammer.

1 in 12 children have a stammer. The way parents/school staff respond to a child's stammer can make a big difference to their fluency of speech. Bilingualism does not cause stammering, so if you or your child speak more than one language, please continue with this. Stammering can present differently in each person. Some examples of stammering include:

1. Repetition of single sounds or whole words, e.g. "I'm in the g-g-g- garden" or "Will, will, will you sit with me?"
2. Prolongation of sounds in a word, e.g. "I like fffootball".
3. Blocking of sounds, when the child's mouth appears ready to talk but there's a block where no sound comes out of the mouth, e.g. "---I need a pencil".

You may also notice behaviours such as a child suddenly stopping speaking in the middle of a sentence. You may also notice facial tension or involuntary movements, e.g. neck and throat movements, or movements around the mouth.

Dysfluency in children and teenagers

Up to 8% of children will stammer at some point, most commonly starting between the ages of 2-5 years old. Children's stammers tend to improve as they become older and 4 out of 5 children who start to stammer will resolve spontaneously or with early communication support. Some children's stammers will disappear completely, and other children's stammers may still exist into adulthood. It is tricky to predict what will happen for each child. Stammering tends to come and go in waves, where children may notice their stammer may be better in comparison to previous months.

Some children try to hide their stammer. They might avoid certain words or sounds. For example, they may switch words out for different words so that they avoid a tricky sound. This can be quite exhausting for young people if they are doing this throughout the day, every day. Situations where a child may stammer more include answering questions, answering the register, saying their name, saying other people's names, and when under time pressures. It's important to praise your child when speaking in these circumstances. Less stressful situations can help build a child's confidence, such as: Feeling relaxed without pressure, familiar environments and people, speaking in small groups.



Top Tips

Here are some top tips for parents, families and school staff with helping your child with their dysfluency.

1. Praise your child for any attempts at communication, as this builds confidence.
2. Avoid asking your child to say their sentence all over again if they stammer, as this can be frustrating, and can create the idea to the child that 'when I stammer my communication is not good enough'.
3. Slow down your own speech. This will give your child time to join in conversation and will help them to slow down their own speech too.
4. Teach listeners the importance of waiting to listeners e.g. peers and siblings.
5. Try not to interrupt or finish their sentences. Give your child plenty of time to talk.
6. Be patient and reassuring. If the child is rushing, just wait attentively.
7. Be positive- listen to what they are saying and not how they are saying it.
8. At home, find time daily (e.g. 5 minutes) when you can be on your own with your child and without distractions, and allow them to choose and lead the play.
9. If you feel anxious whilst your child is stammering, try not to show it. Remain calm, keep eye-contact and be encouraging.
10. Avoid using negative language to describe a stammer. For example, "she is stammering more recently" rather than "her stammer has been bad". This is because this can create the idea for the child that stammering is bad, and not stammering is good. Whereas all attempts at communication are good!
11. Avoid putting the child on the spot. Particularly in class answering questions or answering the register can be quite uncomfortable situations for children who stammer. Allow them to answer questions when they choose to and give them as much time as they need. Offer alternative ways for all children to answer the register to take pressure off answering verbally. For instance, 'Today we are all going to answer the register by clapping our hands in response to our names', or 'Today we are going to put thumbs up for packed lunch and thumbs down for dinners'.

<https://support.actionforstammeringchildren.org/>

Please contact The Orchid Practice for more support or information.