

STUTTERING VERSUS NORMAL DYSFLUENCY

DEFINITIONS

Characteristics of Normal Dysfluency and Dysarthria

"Normal dysfluency" and "pseudostuttering" are the terms used to describe the normal repetition of sounds or syllables children make when they are learning to speak between 18 months and 5 years of age. "Normal dysarthria" and "mispronunciation" are the terms used to describe the incorrect pronunciation of many children as they learn to speak; sounds are substituted or left out, so that some words become hard to identify.

Characteristics of True Stuttering (Stammering)

- Repetitions of sounds, syllables, or short words
- Hesitations and pauses in speech
- Absence of smooth speech flow
- More frequent when child is tired, excited, or stressed
- Fear of talking
- Four times more likely in boys than in girls

Causes of Dysfluency, Dysarthria, and True Stuttering

Normal dysfluency occurs because the mind is able to think of words faster than the tongue can produce them. The cause of normal dysarthria is usually genetic. In most cases, true stuttering develops when a child with normal dysfluency or dysarthria is pressured to improve and in the process becomes sensitive to her inadequacies. Soon thereafter the child begins to anticipate speaking poorly and struggles to correct it. The child becomes tense when she speaks, and the more she attempts to control her speech, the worse it becomes (a vicious cycle). The repetitions become multiple, rather than single. Temporary stuttering can occur at any age if a person becomes overly critical and fearful of her own speech. Although it is normal for us to be aware of what we are saying, how we are saying it is normally subconscious. Genetic factors also play a role in stuttering.

Incidence

Normal dysfluency occurs in 90% of children, in contrast to true stuttering, which occurs in only 1% of children. Approximately 70% of children pronounce words clearly from the onset of speech; however, the other 30% of children between the ages of 1 and 4 years have normal dysarthria and say many words that are unintelligible to their parents and others.

Expected Course of Dysfluency, Dysarthria, and True Stuttering

Normal dysfluency lasts for approximately 2 or 3 months if handled correctly. Unlike normal dysfluency, normal dysarthria is not a brief phase but instead

shows very gradual improvement over several years as development unfolds. The speech of 90% of the children who have dysarthria becomes completely understandable by 4 years of age, and the speech of 96% is understandable by 5 or 6 years of age. Without treatment, true stuttering will become worse and persist in adulthood.

HELPING YOUR CHILD COPE WITH NORMAL DYSFLUENCY AND DYSARTHRIA

The following recommendations should prevent progression to true stuttering in these children.

1. **Encourage conversation.** Sit down and talk with your child at least once each day. Keep the subject matter pleasant and enjoyable. Avoid asking for verbal performance or reciting. Make speaking fun.
2. **Help your child relax when stuttering occurs.** Mild stuttering that's not causing your child any discomfort should be ignored. When your child is having trouble speaking, however, say something reassuring such as "Don't worry, I can understand you." If your child asks you about her stuttering, reassure her that "Your speech will get easier and someday the stuttering will be gone."
3. **Don't correct your child's speech.** Avoid expressing any disapproval, such as by saying, "Stop that stuttering" or "Think before you speak." Remember that this is your child's normal speech for her age and is not controllable. Do not try to improve your child's grammar or pronunciation. Also, avoid praise for good speech because it implies that your child's previous speech wasn't up to standard.
4. **Don't interrupt your child's speech.** Give your child ample time to finish what she is saying. Don't complete sentences for her. Try to pause 2 seconds between the end of your child's sentence and the start of yours. Don't allow siblings to interrupt one another.
5. **Don't ask your child to repeat herself or start over.** If possible, guess at the message. Listen very closely when your child is speaking. Only if you don't understand a comment that appears to be important should you ask your child to restate it.
6. **Don't ask your child to practice a certain word or sound.** This just makes the child more self-conscious about her speech.
7. **Don't ask your child to slow down when she speaks.** Try to convey to your child that you have plenty of time and are not in a hurry. Model a relaxed rate of speech. A rushed type of speech is a temporary phase that can't be changed by orders from the parent.
8. **Don't label your child a stutterer.** Labels tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies. Don't discuss your child's speech problems in her presence.

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9. **Ask other adults not to correct your child's speech.** Share these guidelines with babysitters, teachers, relatives, neighbors, and visitors. Don't allow siblings to tease or imitate your child's stuttering.
10. **Help your child to relax and feel accepted in general.** Try to increase the hours of fun and play your child has each day. Try to slow down the pace of your family life. Avoid situations that seem to bring on stuttering. If there are any areas in which you have been applying strict discipline, back off.
- Your child has associated facial grimacing or tics.
 - Your child has become self-conscious or fearful about her speech.
 - Your family has a history of stuttering in adulthood.
 - Speech is also delayed (no words by 18 months or no sentences by 2½ years).
 - Speech is totally unintelligible to others, and your child is over 2 years old.
 - Speech is more than 50% unintelligible to others, and your child is over 3 years old.
 - Speech is 10% unintelligible to others, and your child is over 4 years old.
 - The dysfluency doesn't improve after trying this program for 2 months.
 - You have other questions or concerns.



CALL OUR OFFICE

During regular hours for a referral to a speech therapist if

- Your child is over 5 years of age.
- Your child has true stuttering.