

## Stuttering

Stuttering is a speech disorder where an individual has trouble speaking smoothly. Their speech may be characterised by the repetition of sounds, repetition of syllables or words (e.g. “li-li-like this”), prolongations of sounds (e.g. “lllllike this”), and/or involuntary pauses in speech known as blocks, where they are unable to produce sound and appear to get ‘stuck,’ despite knowing what they want to say. The individual may also show secondary behaviours (physical signs) such as; facial tension, rapid eye blinking or lip tremors. Stuttering can also have a social and emotional impact on an individual. They may experience feelings of frustration, embarrassment and/or anxiety associated with the stutter. Over time these feelings may lead them to avoid speaking in social settings.

### Importance of Early Intervention

Stuttering resolves in the majority of children, either spontaneously or through intervention. Early intervention is crucial in improving the likelihood of a child reducing or overcoming their stutter.

### Risk Factors/Causes of the Stutter:

#### Genetic Factors

- Family History: A family history of stuttering increases the likelihood of an individual developing a stutter
- Male Sex: Boys are more likely to establish a stutter than girls

#### Neurological Factors

- Stuttering has been associated with unusual activity in the areas of the brain responsible for speech production

#### Environmental Factors

- The severity of a stutter can fluctuate depending on the environment. Anxiety, excitement and fatigue can exacerbate a stutter.

### What you can do as a Parent to Support your Child's Speech Fluency

#### Model Slow and Relaxed Speech

Children often imitate the speech patterns of the adults around them. By slowing down your own speech, you can help your child feel more relaxed when speaking. Speaking slowly with natural pauses, gives the child more time to think about their response, which can make it easier for them to get their words out. This approach can reduce stuttering and promote clearer speech. Instead of telling your child to “slow down” or “take a breath,” it’s more helpful to model this yourself.

#### Focus on Communication, Not Perfection

Encourage your child to share their ideas without focusing on the need for perfect speech. What matters most is what they are saying, not how they are saying it. Show interest in their ideas and let them know you are proud of their efforts to communicate – even when their speech is bumpy. Celebrating their attempts to express their ideas builds confidence and reduces anxiety associated with speaking.



### **Give Them Time to Finish**

Let your child finish what they are saying without interrupting or completing sentences for them. Even if they are finding it difficult, giving them the time and space to speak shows that you respect them, as well as what they have to say. This also makes a big difference in building their confidence and helping them to feel heard and valued.

### **Create a Low-Pressure Speaking Environment**

Try to avoid putting your child on the spot, especially in unfamiliar situations. Asking direct questions like 'what did you do today?' can sometimes feel like pressure. Instead, try to make observational comments that invite them to share (e.g. "it looks like you had fun at school"). This relaxed approach takes the pressure off and encourages more natural, comfortable conversations.

### **Encourage Pausing and Phrasing**

Teach your child to pause between phrases or sentences when they speak. These pauses can help them to slow down and gather their thoughts. Overtime this can make talking feel easier and help their speech flow more smoothly.

### **Collaborate with Educators and Therapists**

Work closely with your child's teachers and, if necessary, speech pathologist to ensure consistent support across environments. Sharing strategies and progress can lead to more effective outcomes.

### **Be Patient and Supportive**

Let your child know that it's okay to stutter and that you're always there to listen. Try not to draw attention to the stutter or make it a big deal. This will help your child to feel safe, supported and confident in expressing themselves.

By using these simple strategies in everyday moments, you can create a safe and supportive space that encourages your child's growth as a speaker. Your patience and encouragement can go a long way in building their confidence when speaking.