

How to help the dysfluent child

Your child has been referred for Speech & Language Therapy because they are having trouble getting their words out. This can be called non-fluency or dysfluency. Many young children experience this non-fluency, which can resemble a stammer/stutter.

There is no evidence that parents cause their children to be non-fluent. However, there are a number of things which parents, and others who come into contact with the child (e.g. other family members, playgroup staff etc), can do to help the child who is showing dysfluent speech.

The following tips will help your child manage their dysfluency.

Do not draw your child's attention to their speech by suggesting that they try things such as slow down, start again, think before you speak etc.

- It is difficult for your child to slow down. Adults find it hard enough to change their rate of talking and we should not ask a child to do something we cannot do ourselves! Your child may be able to go more slowly for a moment or two, but it is unlikely that it will last – then you will both become frustrated!
- Your child may be more fluent if you ask them to say the difficult word again; however, this is unlikely to help them the next time they try to say the same word.
- Telling your child to think first before they speak again draws their attention to their speech and is also likely to have only a short-term effect. In addition it can also add to their frustration – they may already be putting a lot of thought into speaking!

If your child does not appear affected by their dysfluency then simply accept it and do not draw attention to it.

However, if your child shows awareness of their dysfluency by becoming upset, cross, anxious or making comments such as “I can't say that word” then

- **acknowledge** the speech difficulty in a matter-of-fact way; the same way as you would with any other problem
- try not to label it as stammering
- be encouraging and supportive
- provide reassuring comments such as “Isn't it a nuisance when those words won't come out” etc
- help your child to continue the conversation by making comments such as “You were asking me if you could have a drink, let's go and get one” etc
- Do not ask your child to stop, slow down, think carefully and / or try again!

Slow down your own speech when you talk to your child. This will

- make it easier for them to follow what you are saying
- help them feel less rushed



- create a calm, relaxed atmosphere for talking

This can be more helpful than telling your child to slow down, start again or take a deep breath.

You could also try to introduce some extra **pauses** between sentences and phrases.

It may help to pause for one second before you answer your child or ask them a question. This slow, less hurried way of speaking gives your child time before answering and again slows down the rate of the interaction. Pausing for a second before **you** ask or respond to questions is known to help encourage fluency

Allow time for your child to finish what he or she has to say, rather than finishing it for them.

Maintain eye contact and ensure you show interest in what they are saying throughout an episode of dysfluency. Try not to look away whilst your child is speaking and demonstrate interest in what your child is saying rather than how he is saying it.

Reduce the number of questions you ask your child. Make comments instead e.g. instead of asking “What did you do at nursery today?” you could say “I bet you had a good time at nursery today”.



Pay attention to the number of times the child who is stammering is being interrupted, or interrupts others. Explain to all the family the **importance of taking turns** when talking and encourage everyone in the family to do so.

This will:

- reduce the number of interruptions within conversations
- reduce the pressure on the dysfluent child

Try to arrange some time during the day (it can be as little as five minutes) when your child can have your undivided attention in a **calm and relaxed** atmosphere



Praise your child for the things they do well (not related to talking) as this can help build confidence.

Treat your child who may be stammering in exactly the same way as you would any other child regarding their behaviour - discipline needs to be appropriate and consistent.

Children who are dysfluent respond well to a structured environment at home and at school with predictable routines.



Dysfluency can increase when a child is tired. Try to establish regular sleep patterns and a regular, healthy diet.