

If You Think Your Child Stutters

Between the ages of 2 and 6 years, almost all children will begin to repeat sounds, syllables, and whole words when they are speaking. This is not stuttering but rather normal, nonfluent duplications in speech. The amount of repetition will vary from child to child and from situation to situation. The behavior may last from several weeks to several months. It may disappear for a time and then reappear later. It may worsen when the child is tired, excited, or stressed. Eventually it will probably disappear altogether. Patient acceptance of your child's speech at this time is most important.

You can help your child during this time if you . . .

- make sure your child knows he or she is loved for who he or she is
- give your child plenty of time to talk without interruption, and give him or her your full attention
- model slow, unhurried speech, with many pauses, so your child feels relaxed
- try to relieve all tensions in the home
- avoid telling your child to slow down, take it easy, or repeat without stuttering
- reassure your child using comments such as "Many people get stuck on words . . . it's okay," or "I know it's hard to talk sometimes; let's sit down together and talk"
- try not to call attention to your child's repetitions by your facial expressions, words, or deeds
- ensure that your child is getting proper rest, diet, and exercise
- do not interrupt the child as he or she stutters
- try not to change a child's handedness
- avoid finishing your child's words or sentences for him or her; don't interrupt
- try not to be impatient or embarrassed by your child's speech
- maintain eye contact while your child is talking
- try not to expect your child to be a "little adult" in everything he or she does
- be calm in your discipline
- avoid asking your child to "perform" for other people
- enlist the help of the entire family and important people in the child's daily life
- remember that short hesitations and repetitions are perfectly natural in a child's early speech and may continue for some time

you should take your child to a speech-language pathologist if others exhibit impatience with your child's speech or if he or she . . .

shows frustration or struggles when speaking

exhibits grimaces or bodily tension when attempting to speak

stutters with considerable tension and effort

avoids stuttering by changing words and using extra sounds to get started

stutters on more than 10% of his or her speech

stutters for 6 months or longer



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8700 Shoal Creek Boulevard
Austin, Texas 78757-6897
800/897-3202 Fax 800/397-7633
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