

Stuttering in Children: Causes, Symptoms, and Solutions



Highlights

Stuttering is a speech disorder that stops the natural flow of speech. Most children will outgrow stuttering without treatment - but you can't tell who will and who won't. A speech pathologist can help your child with their stuttering.

In This Article

- Understanding Stuttering
- Recognizing the Signs
- Different Forms of Stuttering
- Factors Behind Stuttering
- Approaches to Treatment
- Communicating with Your Child
- Tools and Assistance

Understanding Stuttering

Stuttering is a speech disorder that disrupts the natural flow of speech, making talking difficult.

It involves:

Hesitations

Repetitions

Silent blocks \(\(when your child tries to speak but no sound comes out\)\)

People who stutter know what they want to say but have difficulty expressing it.

Stuttering can negatively affect your child's self-esteem and social relationships.

It is common for children between the ages of 3 to 4 to go through periods of stuttering, which may start suddenly or gradually.

For most children, stuttering improves on its own over time.

Recognizing the Signs

Signs and symptoms of stuttering can vary between children and may include:

Difficulty starting a word, sentence, or phrase

Prolonging a word or sounds within a word

Repeating a sound, syllable, or word

Brief silences or pauses within a word \(\(broken word\)\)

The addition of extra words like "um" if difficulty moving to the next word is expected

Nonverbal signs may include:

Grimacing

Blinking

Tensing

Stuttering can worsen with tiredness or stress and can vary from mild to severe.

Different Forms of Stuttering

There are three main types of stuttering:

Repetitions: Repeating a sound, part of a word, a whole word, or a phrase.

Prolongations: Stretching out a sound.

Blocks: When no sound comes out.

Your child may exhibit one or more of these behaviors.

Factors Behind Stuttering

The exact cause of stuttering is unknown, but it is related to brain activity, making it a physical disorder, not a psychological one.

Stuttering is not caused by:

A specific event

Tiredness

Anxiety

Parenting practices

Other psychological factors

Anxiety does not cause stuttering but can worsen it, creating a negative cycle.

Stuttering can run in families but can also occur without family history.

Males are more likely to stutter than females.

Stuttering affects people from all backgrounds, intelligence levels, and personalities.

Approaches to Treatment

It is difficult to predict whether a child will recover naturally from stuttering or need therapy. However, it is recommended that all preschool-aged children who begin to stutter receive treatment.

Early intervention with a speech pathologist is most effective, especially as social anxiety often develops in children from 7 years old.

Speech pathologists are experts in stuttering and evidence-based interventions. They will help set goals and work with your child towards achieving them.

Therapy can be done in person or via telehealth, either individually or in groups.

For adolescents and adults, treatment focuses on correcting speech and reducing anxiety associated with stuttering.

There are no medications for stuttering.

Communicating with Your Child

When speaking with your child who stutters:

Avoid interrupting or finishing their sentences

Be patient

Show interest in what they're saying

Tools and Assistance

Speech Pathologists: Speech pathologists are trained professionals who specialize in diagnosing and treating speech disorders, including stuttering. They provide tailored therapy to help your child develop smoother speech patterns. You can search for a qualified speech pathologist through local healthcare providers or speech pathology associations.

Speech Therapy Apps: Several apps are designed to assist children with speech disorders. Some popular ones include: **Fluency Coach:** A mobile app designed to help children practice speech fluency through interactive exercises. **Speech Blubs:** A fun app with games and activities that promote speech development for children with stuttering.

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Support Groups: Many communities offer support groups for children who stutter and their families. These groups provide an opportunity to share experiences

and gain insight from others facing similar challenges. Check local parenting centers or speech pathology associations for group listings.

Educational Resources: Websites like the National Stuttering Association (NSA) offer valuable resources, from articles to video tutorials on how to support a child who stutters.

Online Therapy: If in-person visits are difficult, many speech pathologists offer telehealth services. Telehealth allows for therapy sessions to be conducted remotely, ensuring that your child can receive the help they need from the comfort of home.

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