

DYSFLUENCY IN SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN

The usual characteristics of dysfluent speech in the young child are repetition of sounds, words and phrases. Other characteristics may include hesitancy and pauses in speech or making some sounds longer. Speech is more dysfluent when the child is excited and has a lot to say or is upset about something.

The problem is often made worse when the child is aware of his speech difficulties and becomes anxious about talking. If this anxiety persists, the problem may develop into a stammer e.g. loss of eye contact, extra facial movements and a reluctance to talk.

Ideas on how to help non-fluent speech

It is very important that attention is not drawn to the child's speech difficulties as this can result in the dysfluency becoming worse. However if they do try and talk about it, don't ignore it, try and reassure them that it is okay and that this happens to lots of children and adults. Encourage them to be open about when they have difficulties with their speech.

Do not correct the child's speech (e.g. 'slow down' or 'start again'). It is important they are not teased about their speech. If teasing does occur encourage them to be assertive and open about it to other children e.g. "yes I know it happens sometimes and it's not a problem".

1. The child will probably have some days when their speech is almost fluent and other days when their speech deteriorates. Therefore encourage the child to speak on these "good days" so that they can experience "fluency".

Create opportunities to speak.

On "bad days" remove the pressure to speak and concentrate on activities where little speech is required e.g. playing outside, craft painting etc.

2. Some speech situations cause more "speech anxiety" than others. Try to prevent these situations from arising.

They include:

a. interrupting the child when speaking

- b. not listening to the child when speaking
 - c. competition for the "conversation floor" e.g. with friends, brothers or sisters
 - d. speaking under difficult conditions or emotional stress e.g. when angry, cross, upset, rushed etc
 - e. speaking when tired or distracted
 - f. being forced to speak when they do not wish to e.g. asked to recite a nursery rhyme or asked to tell someone what they have done (e.g. "tell nanny what you did yesterday)
 - g. constant questioning about the day's events e.g. "what did you do at nursery?", "why didn't you eat your dinner?"
3. Sometimes children show non-fluent speech, when the speech provided by adults or siblings is difficult for the child to follow or copy.

In these cases, reduce the length and complexity of the phrases that you say to the child. Try and keep sentences simple.

4. Always maintain good general communication skills
- Make sure you continue to look at your child when they are talking, especially if they are non-fluent
 - Allow plenty of time for them to finish speaking - sit down and look relaxed so they know they have plenty of time
 - Make sure your facial expression is appropriate to what they are saying - it's easy to frown when they get stuck on words
 - Turn-take in conversations so that your child learns to speak at the right time and does not expect everyone to stop and listen to everything they say.