

DYSFLUENCY IN YOUNG CHILDREN

Between the ages of two and six years many children go through a stage of dysfluent speech, which in most cases will disappear.

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.

It is thought this period of dysfluency is related to rapidly developing language skills.

The problem is often made worse when the child is aware of his/her 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 will cause **anxiety** in the child, resulting in the dysfluency becoming **worse**.

Do not correct the child's speech (e.g. 'slow down' or 'start again'). It is important s/he is not teased about his/her speech. All the help given, should be "**indirect**"

1. The child will probably have some days when his speech is almost fluent and other days when his/her speech deteriorates. Therefore encourage the child to speak on these "good days" so that s/he 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:

- Interrupting the child when she/he is speaking.

- Not listening to the child when she/he is speaking.
 - Competition for the "conversation floor" with friends, brothers or sisters.
 - Speaking under difficult conditions or emotional stress e.g. when angry, cross, upset, rushed etc.
 - Speaking when tired or distracted.
 - Being forced to speak when she/he does not wish to e.g. asked to recite a nursery rhyme or asked to tell someone what s/he has done (e.g. "tell nanny what you did yesterday).
 - 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 **vocabulary** of the phrases that you say to the child. Try and keep sentences simple.
4. To **help** fluency, provide a "rhythm" to superimpose on the child's speech e.g.
- By using musical instruments.
 - By marching together whilst saying nursery rhymes.
 - Singing nursery rhymes whilst clapping.
 - Playing rhythmic speech games e.g. "I Spy....."
5. 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 him/her to finish speaking - sit down and look relaxed so s/he knows s/he has plenty of time.
 - Make sure your facial expression is appropriate to what s/he is saying - it's easy to frown when s/he gets 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 s/he says.
6. Let your child take the lead during play - do not feel you always have to talk for him/her to benefit from play.