



WHAT IS FLUENCY?

Speech fluency refers to the smoothness, rhythm, and flow of speech production.

TYPICAL DISFLUENCIES

It is common for children to demonstrate developmental disfluency (or normal interruptions in speech) between the ages of 2-5 years old as they are learning language. These disfluencies typically resolve on their own. Typical disfluencies may include:

- *Interjections, for example: "I umm like elephants"*
- *Hesitations between words, for example: "I like.... elephants"*
- *Whole word or phrase repetitions, for example: "I like, I like elephants"*

A child may be exhibiting a fluency disorder if they present with any of the following characteristics:

Stuttering that lasts longer than 6 months,
Family history of stuttering,

Stuttering more frequently or tensing up while stuttering,
Avoiding speaking

If you are not sure whether your child has a stuttering disorder or demonstrates typical disfluencies please seek consultation with a speech language pathologist.

FLUENCY DISORDERS

Stuttering

Seen in both adults and children, this is the most common type of fluency disorder. People who stutter know what they want to say but struggle to say it. Someone who stutters may present with the following:

- Repetitions of sounds, syllables, words, or phrases, for example: "I I-I-like el-el-elephants"
- Prolongations of sounds, for example: "I llllllike elephants"
- Blocks which impede the flow of speech, for example: "I li...ke el...ephants"
- Secondary characteristics such as head movements, facial grimacing, eye blinking, etc
- Physical tension
- Anxiety around speaking
- Avoidance of sounds words or situations
- *decreased overall communication*

Cluttering

A fluency disorder seen in both children and adults, marked by a rapid or irregular speech rate, excessive disfluencies, and difficulty organizing clear speech. People who clutter are often unaware of their speech differences or that others may have trouble understanding them. Cluttering can occur on its own or alongside stuttering.

COMMUNICATION MODIFICATION IDEAS FOR FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

Model Pauses and Easy Talking

Speak with your child in an unhurried manner, pausing often. After your child speaks, wait a few seconds before responding. Easy pauses show that it's okay to take time when speaking and that a pause won't stop you from expressing yourself. Model this behavior rather than saying things like "slow down" or "try again slowly," which children may interpret negatively.

Give Full Attention

Listen patiently without rushing, interrupting or finishing your child's sentences. Validate your child's message, even if stuttering occurs. Help to teach other family members to use this conversational style.

Reduce Demands

Avoid pressuring your child to speak quickly or answer right away. Avoid asking many questions in repetition and instead use [comments with declarative language](#) (e.g., "I wonder what happened at school today.") or provide choices to help reduce demands.

Turn Taking

Encourage all family members take turns talking and listening. Starting with structured activities or during family meal time can be helpful if children often talk over each other. Less interruptions will promote easier self expression for all children, regardless of fluency.

Validate the Message and Build Confidence

Respond to what your child says rather than how they say it. Praise their strengths, including speaking skills and beyond. Positive comments from caregivers regardless of stuttering will foster pride and healthy attitudes toward speaking, which may reduce a child's struggle with stuttering.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND EXAMPLES

- [American Institute for Stuttering](#)
- [Friends: The National Association of Young People Who Stutter](#)
- [Stuttering Association For the Young: Listening Tips](#)
- [MY STUTTER: Video Series](#)