

# Stammering

## What is stammering?

Stammering (also called stuttering or dysfluency) usually starts in childhood, often between the ages of 2-5 years, and coinciding with the rapid development of new physical and mental skills.

Stammering is different from early speech and language difficulties because it can start at different stages in a child's life. About 5% of young children experience some difficulty with their fluency at some point.

For some it starts gradually – it comes and goes and seems to be a part of a child's natural attempts to use more and more words.

For other children it can begin quite suddenly, sometimes almost overnight, and sometimes quite severely. This can be very worrying indeed, for both the child and for their family. For some children it can disappear just as quickly, within days or months. About 1% continue to stammer into adulthood.

## Features of stammering

You may notice the child:

- is repeating whole words (“and-and-and-and-and- I want one too”)
- is repeating parts of words several times (“mu-mu-mu-mummy”)
- cannot seem to get started and no sound comes out for several seconds (“..... I got teddy”)
- is stretching sounds in a word (“I want a ssssstory”)
- is putting extra effort into saying the words
- has tense, jerky speech

These examples vary for each child: you may hear some or all of these features when the child talks.

The frequency of stammers will often vary depending on the situation (e.g. when s/he is relaxed or excited, whether s/he is talking to friends or strangers).

Stammering may come and go; you may notice the child's speech is fluent for several days, weeks or months at a time, then speaking becomes more difficult again.

It is not known exactly why a child stammers; it is likely that a combination of factors is involved. There is no evidence that parents cause stammering. Stammering often runs in families and occurs worldwide in all cultures and social groups.