

# 7 TIPS FOR TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD

*Experts agree that most children who stutter benefit from taking time to speak at a rate that promotes fluency. These guidelines represent a number of ways that adults can help.*

**1. Reduce the pace.** Speak with your child in an unhurried way, pausing frequently. Wait a few seconds after your child finishes before you begin to speak. Your own easy relaxed speech will be far more effective than any advice such as “slow down” or “try it again slowly.” For some children, it is also helpful to introduce a more relaxed pace of life for awhile.

**2. Full listening.** Try to increase those times that you give your child your undivided attention and are really listening. This does not mean dropping everything every time she speaks.

**3. Asking questions.** Asking questions is a normal part of life – but try to resist asking one after the other. Sometimes it is more helpful to comment on what your child has said and wait.

**4. Turn taking.** Help all members of the family take turns talking and listening. Children find it much easier to talk when there are fewer interruptions.

**5. Building confidence.** Use descriptive praise to build confidence. An example would be “I like the way you picked up your toys. You’re so helpful,” instead of “That’s great.” Praise strengths unrelated to talking as well, such as athletic skills, being organized, independent, or careful.

**6. Special times.** Set aside a few minutes at a regular time each day when you can give your undivided attention to your child. This quiet, calm time — no TV, iPad or phones — can be a confidence builder for young children. As little as five minutes a day can make a difference.

**7. Normal rules apply.** Discipline the child who stutters just as you do your other children and just as you would if he didn’t stutter.

## RISK FACTOR CHART

Some factors may indicate that your child is more at risk for stuttering. Knowing these factors will help you decide whether or not your child needs to see a speech-language pathologist.

Place a check next to each that is true for the child.

Risk Factor	Elevated Risk	True for Child
Family history of stuttering	A parent, sibling, or other family member who still stutters	
Age at onset	After age 3 <sup>1/2</sup>	
Time since onset	Stuttering 6–12 months or longer	
Gender	Male	
Other speech production concerns	Speech sound errors or trouble being understood	
Language skills	Advanced, delayed, or disordered	

Our videos are available at [StutteringHelp.org/Streaming](https://StutteringHelp.org/Streaming).  
More information and resources available on [StutteringHelp.org](https://StutteringHelp.org).



A Nonprofit Organization  
Since 1947 – Helping Those Who Stutter  
P.O. Box 11749 · Memphis, TN 38111-0749  
[info@StutteringHelp.org](mailto:info@StutteringHelp.org) · 800-992-9392  
[stutteringhelp.org](https://stutteringhelp.org) · [tartamudez.org](https://tartamudez.org)



# IF YOU THINK YOUR CHILD STUTTERS



A Nonprofit Organization  
Since 1947 – Helping Those Who Stutter

Compiled by Dr. Barry Guitar, University of Vermont, and  
Dr. Edward G. Conture, Vanderbilt University



# Is it stuttering?

If your child has difficulty speaking and tends to hesitate on or repeat certain syllables, words, or phrases, he may have a stuttering problem. Or he may simply be going through periods of normal disfluency that most children experience as they learn to speak. This pamphlet will help you understand the difference between stuttering and normal language development.

## The normally disfluent child

- The normally disfluent child occasionally repeats syllables or words, li-li-like this. Disfluencies may also include hesitations and the use of fillers such as “uh,” “er,” “um.”
- Disfluencies occur most often between ages 1 1/2 and 5 years, and they tend to come and go. They are usually signs that a child is learning to use language in new ways. If disfluencies disappear for several weeks, then return, the child may just be going through another stage of learning.

## The child with milder stuttering

- A child with milder stuttering repeats sounds more than twice, li-li-li-li-like this. Tension and struggle may be evident in the facial muscles, especially around the mouth.
- The pitch of the voice may rise with repetitions, and occasionally the child will experience a “block”—no airflow or voice for several seconds.
- Disfluencies may come and go but are now present more often than absent.
- Effortless repetitions or prolongations of sounds are the healthiest form of stuttering. Anything that helps your child stutter like this instead of stuttering tensely or avoiding words is helping.

## How to help right away

- Try to model slow and relaxed speech when talking with your child, and encourage other family members to do the same. Don’t speak so slowly that it sounds abnormal, but keep it unhurried, with many pauses. Television’s Mr. Rogers is a good example of this style of speech.
- Slow and relaxed speech can be the most effective when combined with some time each day for the child to have one parent’s undivided attention. Set aside a few minutes at a regular time when you are doing nothing else but listening to your child talk about whatever is on his mind.
- When your child talks to you or asks you a question, try to **pause** a second or so before you answer. This will help make talking less hurried, more relaxed.
- Try not to be upset or annoyed when stuttering increases. Your child is doing his best as he copes with learning many new skills all at the same time. Your patient, accepting attitude will help him.
- If your child is frustrated or upset at times when her stuttering is worse, reassure her. Some children respond well to hearing, “I know it’s hard to talk at times...but lots of people get stuck on words...it’s okay.” Other children are most reassured by a touch or a hug when they seem frustrated.

## The child with more severe stuttering

- If your child stutters on more than 10% of his speech, stutters with considerable effort and tension, or avoids stuttering by changing words and using extra sounds to get started, he will profit from having therapy with a specialist in stuttering. Complete blocks of speech are more common than repetitions or prolongations now, and disfluencies tend to be present in most speaking situations.
- The Stuttering Foundation at **800-992-9392** and **[www.StutteringHelp.org](http://www.StutteringHelp.org)** will provide you with the names of speech-language pathologists who specialize in stuttering.
- The suggestions for parents of a child with mild stuttering are also appropriate when the child has a severe problem. Try to remember that slowing and relaxing *your own speaking style* is far more helpful than telling the child to slow down.
- Don’t be afraid to talk to your child about stuttering. Show patience and acceptance as you discuss it. Overcoming stuttering is often more a matter of losing fear of stuttering than a matter of trying harder.