Stuttering or fluency problems

Stuttering is a speech disorder where a child has trouble with the smooth flow of speech. Children who stutter know what they want to say but have trouble saying it.

What does stuttering sound like?
Stuttering may sound like this:
- Repeating part of or whole words (‘M...m...Mom’ or ‘Can...can...can I go?’)
- Repeated phrases (‘Can I go...can I go...can I go to the store?’)
- Stretched out sounds (‘Sssssister’ or ‘whaaaaat’)
- Blocks (moments where no sounds come out when your child is trying to speak)

What causes stuttering?
No one knows exactly what causes stuttering, but it may be related to the brain activity that produces speech.
- Stuttering can run in families. If a parent or relative stutters, your child has a higher chance of stuttering.
- Anxiety or stress can make stuttering worse.
- Stuttering is not caused by low intelligence, emotional problems, parenting style or personality type.

What do I need to know about stuttering?
- Most children begin stuttering between 2–5 years old, when they start putting words together into short sentences.
- Stuttering may start suddenly or gradually. It may become more severe later if it isn’t treated.
- Boys are 2 times more likely to stutter than girls. Stuttering can be more severe over time and even throughout the day.
- Getting early treatment for your child’s stuttering is best. Some children grow out of stuttering without treatment, but it’s impossible to know if that will happen for your child.
- Your child may stutter more when they are excited, tired, nervous, arguing, competing to be heard, using complicated words, or have limited time to speak.
Some children who stutter may avoid speaking in some situations (like on the phone), using certain words, or speaking with some people.

**What should I do if my child stutters?**

- Have your child talk to you without distractions or competing family members. Listen to what your child says, not how they say it. Tell them it is okay to stutter.
- Let your child finish what they are saying. Don’t finish words or sentences for them.
- Repeat or rephrase what your child says to show you understood.
- Reassure your child if they are aware of the stutter and are worry about it.
- Interact normally with your child. Don’t interrupt them to help fix or treat the stutter. Saying ‘Take a breath’ or Slow down’ does not help. It can make your child feel more self-conscious.

**What should I avoid if my child stutters?**

- Don’t draw attention to your child’s speech in front of others.
- Don’t put your child in situations where they have to speak alone to someone they don’t know.
- Don’t interrupt your child’s speech or complete sentences for them.
- Don’t criticize your child’s speech.
- Don’t tease or let others tease your child about their stutter.
- Don’t let other people make comments or try to correct your child’s speech.

**When do I need to get help for my child’s stutter?**

Contact a speech language pathologist when:

- Your child becomes self-conscious about or afraid of talking.
- Your child has stuttered for more than 6 months.
- Your child is 5 years old or older.
- Your child also blinks their eyes a lot and grimaces while stuttering.
- Your child avoids words or speaking situations.

**Notes**