

Children and Stuttering

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

What Is Stuttering?

According to the Stuttering Foundation, stuttering occurs when the flow of speech is broken by repetitions (li-li-like this), prolongations (lllllike this), or abnormal stoppages (no sound) of sounds and syllables. Unusual facial and body movements may also be associated with the effort to speak.

What Causes Stuttering?

While the exact causes of stuttering are unknown, we do understand that both genetic and developmental factors influence the onset, development, continuation, or recovery from stuttering. During development, speech, language, motor, cognitive, temperament, and environmental influences, both inherited and experienced, all interact in a complex manner. As a result, about 5% of children go through a period of stuttering, and 80% will recover without long-term intervention. The other 20% (or 1% of the population) are more likely to be boys, have family histories of chronic stuttering, have experienced stuttering for more than 12 to 14 months, and have linguistic, physiological, psychological, and/or other developmental or environmental influences that interact, impacting their fluency development in a way that perpetuates stuttering.

What Can I Do to Help My Child's Speech?

What to do when you listen to your child

- Pay more attention to what your child is saying (the content or message) than to how he or she is saying it (whether it's stuttered).
- Pause briefly before responding to your child's questions, statements, and comments.
- Try not to finish your child's thoughts and sentences. Allow your child to complete his or her own thoughts and sentences.
- Try to maintain reasonably relaxed body language when talking with your child, especially when he or she seems to be having trouble talking.

What to do when you talk to your child

- Make talking fun! Let your child talk about things that interest him/her.



- Speak at a normal to slow-normal rate, particularly when your child is having trouble talking.
- When your child is less fluent, reduce the number and complexity of your questions. For example, ask your child, "Did you play inside or outside today?" rather than, "Tell me everything you did at recess today."
- Let your child know you like his or her attempts to talk by saying such things as "I really like the things you tell me," together with positive, encouraging nonverbal responses (for example, smiling).

How Do I Respond to My Child's Stuttering?

- When asked, talk openly about stuttering in a matter-of-fact way and at a level appropriate to your child.
- Try to minimize verbally and/or nonverbally reacting to your child's stuttering. For example, avoid telling him or her to "relax," "say it again," "take a deep breath," "slow down," think about what you are saying."
- When your child shows frustration with stuttering (for example, refusing to talk, covering his or her mouth, or saying "Why can't I talk?"), respond as you would to a skinned knee, that is, in a matter-of-fact way by acknowledging the situation, comforting your child, and moving on.

Please see reverse.



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Helpful Tips For You and Your Family

- Establish and be consistent with the child and family's daily routines.
- Minimize undue lifestyle time pressure. For example, try to avoid doing several things at once. Instead, try to establish a reasonably relaxed atmosphere in your everyday life.
- When possible, give your child advanced notice about upcoming changes in family routines, schedules, or events (for example, moving, new baby, change in school or daycare, family vacation, new caregiver).
- Help all family members learn to take their turns talking and listening to one another.
- Educate yourselves about stuttering.

Who We Are and Who We Serve

The **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC)** works with and for people with disabilities and their family members, service providers and advocates, researchers and policy makers. It is among only a few centers nationwide to be a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, a *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Center, and a Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities Training Program. The following are some of the ways the Center's programs and staff can assist families, educators, and other service providers.

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder is a free statewide phone, web, and print referral service in English and Spanish. It connects the Tennessee disability community with service providers and resources. Its website database has over 3,000 agencies searchable by Tennessee county and service. Pathfinder is a project of the VKC, TN Council on Developmental Disabilities, TN Department of Health, and the TN Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Contact www.familypathfinder.org, (615) 322-8529, toll-free (800) 640-4636.

Two Ways to Take Part in Research

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center serves families through research studies. **StudyFinder** is a searchable database that lists current VKC studies, including ASD research. Studies seek people of all ages with and without developmental disabilities. See vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/studyfinder/, (615) 936-0448. **Research Match** is a secure place for volunteers and researchers to connect. Once you sign up and get added to the registry, a researcher will contact you if you're a possible match for the research study. See www.researchmatch.org.

Other Resources

- **Developmental Stuttering Project** - This project investigates the importance of emotions and language in childhood stuttering, yielding advances in science and treatment. vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/childhoodstuttering, (615) 936-5126.
- **Vanderbilt Bill Wilkerson Center Fluency Program** This clinic serves clients ages 3 to adult who stutter. www.vanderbilthealth.com/billwilkerson/30037, (615) 936-5000.
- **Stuttering Foundation of America** www.stutteringhelp.org
- **National Stuttering Association** www.nsastutter.org
- **National Association of Young People Who Stutter** www.friendswhostutter.org
- **American Speech-Language-Hearing Association** www.asha.org

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Contact the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center
Nashville (615) 322-8240
Toll-Free (866) 936-VUKC [8852]
www.kc.vanderbilt.edu
kc@vanderbilt.edu

