

# Supporting a child who stutters

October 24 2022, by Laurel Kelly

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International Stuttering Awareness Day was observed on Saturday, Oct. 22, which makes this a good time to learn about supporting a child who stutters.

Approximately 5%–10% of all children will stutter for some period in their life, according to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. And boys are two to three times as likely to stutter as girls.

Stuttering, also called stammering or childhood-onset fluency disorder, is a [speech disorder](#) that involves frequent and significant problems with normal fluency and flow of speech. People who stutter know what they want to say, but they have difficulty saying it. They may repeat or prolong a word, a syllable, or a consonant or vowel sound. Or they may pause during speech because they've reached a problematic word or sound.

Stuttering is common among [young children](#) as a normal part of learning to speak. Young children may stutter when their speech and [language abilities](#) aren't developed enough to keep up with what they want to say. Most children outgrow this developmental stuttering. Sometimes, however, stuttering is a chronic condition that persists into adulthood. This type of stuttering can affect [self-esteem](#) and interactions with other people.

Call your child's primary health care professional for a referral or contact a speech-language pathologist directly for an appointment if stuttering:

- Lasts more than six months.
- Occurs with other speech or language problems.
- Becomes more frequent or continues as the child grows older.
- Occurs with muscle tightening or visible struggle to speak.
- Affects the ability to effectively communicate at school or in social interactions.
- Causes anxiety or [emotional problems](#), such as fear or avoidance of situations where speaking is required.

After a comprehensive evaluation by a speech-language pathologist, a decision about the best [treatment approach](#) can be made.

Several approaches are available to treat children who stutter. Because of varying individual issues and needs, a method or combination of methods that's helpful for one child may not be as effective for another. Treatment can include speech therapy, [electronic devices](#) to enhance fluency, [cognitive behavioral therapy](#) and parental involvement in practicing techniques at home.

In addition to treatment, these tips also may help:

Listen attentively to your child.

- Maintain natural eye contact when your child speaks.
- Wait for your child to say the word he or she is trying to say.
- Don't jump in to complete the sentence or thought.
- Set aside time when you can talk to your child without distractions.
- Mealtimes can provide a good opportunity for conversation.
- Speak slowly, in an unhurried way.
- If you speak in this way, your child often will do the same, which may decrease stuttering.
- Take turns talking.
- Encourage everyone in your family to be a good listener and to take turns talking.
- Strive for calm.
- Do your best to create a relaxed, calm atmosphere at home where your child feels comfortable speaking freely.
- Don't focus on your child's stuttering.
- Try not to draw attention to the stuttering during daily interactions. Don't expose your child to situations that create a sense of urgency, pressure or a need to rush, or that require your

child to speak in front of others.

- Offer praise rather than criticism.
- It's better to praise your child for speaking clearly than to draw attention to stuttering. If you correct your child's [speech](#), do so in a gentle, positive way.
- Accept your child just as he or she is.
- Don't react negatively or criticize or punish your child for stuttering. This can add to feelings of insecurity and self-consciousness. Support and encouragement can make a big difference.

Provided by Mayo Clinic

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