

Parenting a Child Who Stutters
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Fluency Friday Plus

Some Issues and a Bit of Advice

- **Understanding Variability**

Stuttering is a highly variable disorder:

Some children stutter all of the time.

Most children stutter sometimes---i.e. when tired, stressed, upset, competing for talk time.

Some children are fluent for weeks or months at a time and then stutter for weeks or months, repeating the cycle a number of times. (Usually, if they are truly incipient stutterers rather than normally disfluent children, the stuttering part of the cycle becomes long and longer, while the fluent periods become shorter and shorter).

- **Discipline**

When children stutter, parents sometimes think they must not discipline them:

Do not be afraid to discipline your child. Children who stutter may need to be disciplined just as children who do not stutter may need to be disciplined.

If stuttering is not talked about, children begin to feel that they are doing something so bad, that no one can even mention it.

Supportive family members refrain from interrupting each other or finishing each other's words, ideas, or sentences.

Supportive family members listen for the message rather than how it is communicated.

Talking in shorter utterances with a somewhat slow rate of speech encourages more fluent speech from children struggling to keep up.

Waiting for about 2 seconds before answering another speaker, sets an easier speaking pace for children, whether they stutter or not.

Encourage children to express their opinions, feelings, and fears.

Help children understand that we value their feelings.

Help children to believe that telling other people how they feel is important.

Help children to celebrate their successes and to believe that they have many more strengths than weaknesses.

Discipline should be clear, immediate, and appropriate to the offense.

Children who stutter should not be disciplined for stuttering.

If you have other children, use the same discipline with your child who stutters as you would with a child who is fluent.

- **Talk Time**

Children who stutter benefit from designated talk times:

Share some time every day that is a designated talk time with your children.

Be sure that each child has a sufficient amount of time to say what s/he wants to communicate.

Meal times are good times for family talk time.

Bed times are good times for individual talk time.

- **Family Interactions**

Family members are important support people for children who stutter.

Siblings should be included in the family discussions about stuttering and fluency.

- **Talking to Teachers About Stuttering**

Teachers want to understand stuttering and how to help children who stutter:

Meet with your child's teacher or teachers at the beginning of each school year.

Provide them with information about stuttering from the Stuttering Foundation of America, Friends, or the National Stuttering Association.

Talk with them about your child's unique issues and give them input about how to handle stuttering in the classroom.

i.e. If children are being called upon to speak in class, suggest that the teacher call on your child early in the lesson to avoid a build-up of anticipation.

When asking your child a question, you may want to suggest that the teachers save a question for your child that requires a brief response.

Encourage the teachers to call on your child if s/he raises his/her hand, rather than calling on the child without warning.

If children are called upon to read aloud, suggest that the teachers have children read in pairs, since choral reading is much easier for children who stutter.

- **Teasing**

Children tease each other. That is a fact. It is important to talk with your child about teasing and help him/her develop strategies to deal with teasing.

Humor goes a long way toward decreasing teasing. If your child is able to make a joke out of a painful moment, the teaser/bully might be less apt to tease in the future.

Avoid asking teachers to punish teasers, as this generally makes matters worse. Instead, a general lesson about diversity might help children understand that there are many ways for people to be different from each other. The culture of the classroom can have a powerful positive effect on teasing.

Help your child brainstorm a list of things to say when someone teases him/her. Then ask him/her to select the ones that feel right for him/her.

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