

THE PRINCE'S SPEECH:

stuttering: when should parents' worry?

by Monica Hamburg, MD



Many young children develop a stutter as they are learning to speak, and this can be quite alarming to parents. Stuttering children have trouble getting their words out. They may repeat words or syllables over and over (“can-can-can I go”) or make a long sound (“caaaaaaaaaaan I go”) or have blocks in their speech. It can come on suddenly or gradually, but when should you worry?

Most two-year-olds who stutter outgrow stuttering on their own. Certain risk factors make it more likely that stuttering may persist such as family history (if a parent or sibling still stutters), older age at onset (after age 3 and a half), lasting more than 6-12 months without resolving, and male gender. More evidence is showing that we should wait at least 12 months before considering speech therapy, as many cases resolve on their own before this time.

Why do toddlers stutter? The usual explanation is the incredible expansion of speech they are undergoing. Their brain is often working faster than their mouth! In fact, a recent study in Australia showed that toddlers who stuttered had higher speech and language skills than their counterparts!

What can you do to help? There are some things you can do to help your toddler if she is stuttering:

- **Model slow speech!** If the family is speaking quickly, the toddler may feel pressure to do the same. Try to slow down your own speech when talking to your toddler so she can see an example of slow, unpressured speech. (Remember Mr. Rogers? His speech is an excellent example of a good speech rate to use when talking to your toddler).
- **Don't interrupt** or finish your toddler's sentences. Give her the time to finish what she is saying. Listen, and don't act impatient or annoyed! Also, telling your toddler to “Slow down” or “Calm down” may seem like a good idea, but this can actually cause some toddlers more stress, so these phrases should be avoided.
- **Spend some time alone with the child**, just listening to her. If there are other siblings around, she may feel like she never gets a minute of listening time!
- **Give reassurance** if she is very frustrated getting a word out. Tell her that getting some words out is hard and lots of people get stuck ! Even a simple hug can help.



If your child has multiple risk factors (see above), seems to want to avoid talking, or the stutter has lasted more than 12 months, it may be time to consider speech therapy. Your pediatrician can help you with this decision. The good news is that most toddlers who stutter will outgrow it!

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