

# Should I Worry About Stuttering?

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More than half of all toddlers learning to talk go through a stage where their speech is not smooth and flowing. It can be called stuttering, stammering, or choppy speech. However, Speech-Language Pathologists prefer to call this behavior "primary dysfluencies." This is a NORMAL part of learning to talk, and usually occurs when children progress from single words to longer strings of words. Children exhibit dysfluencies in a variety of ways, such as repeating words ("my my my turn"), repeating sounds ("I want a c-c-c-cookie"), prolonging sounds ("thaaat's mine"), or adding sounds ("Daddy uh uh go uh uh bye bye"). Here's the good news – THIS IS A NORMAL STAGE IN LEARNING TO CONVERSE IN SENTENCES, AND MOST CHILDREN GROW OUT OF THIS STAGE EASILY.

## The following are suggestions for coping with normal dysfluencies.

- Don't call attention to the dysfluencies. Most young children are not aware that their speech is not fluent. Asking them to stop and start over will only cause frustration.
- Model a slower speaking pace for your child. Don't ask your child to "slow down." When given a good speech model, children automatically respond with a slower rate. You can also reduce the length of your sentences to give younger children an easier model for expressing ideas.
- Dysfluencies increase with stress, excitement, and increased activity. The holidays are a particularly busy time. Make sure that you and your child have some time each day in a quiet, relaxed setting to read a book together and talk slowly about the pictures.
- Children are rarely dysfluent when they sing. Sing-along games, finger plays, and simple poems/nursery rhymes ("Five little monkeys jumping on the bed...") are fun and encourage fluency.