



# ***FLUENCY***



## **What is Fluency?**

Fluency refers to the smoothness with which sounds, syllables, words and phrases are joined together during speech.

## **What is a fluency disorder?**

A fluency disorder is the interruption of the smoothness of speech. It is commonly referred to as 'stuttering'. Behaviours commonly displayed in stuttering are:

- repeating sounds and syllables, such as "I I I I can do it";
- prolonged sounds, such as "where is my sssssister?";
- blocking of sounds, where a child tries to say a sound and nothing comes out;
- broken words, such as "mon...key".

Children may develop non verbal behaviours, such as head movements and blinking, which are associated with their stutter. Fluency disorders may also involve the interruption of the normal rhythm of speech.

## **What are the causes of a fluency disorder?**

There are many theories suggesting the cause of stuttering. The exact cause of stuttering is still unknown. Stuttering may be genetic, for example, if a relative or parent stutters the child has a higher chance of stuttering. It is suggested that stuttering may be related to brain functions that regulate speech production. There is no evidence to suggest that low intelligence or emotional problems cause stuttering.

### **What are some facts about fluency disorders?**

- Most children begin stuttering between two and five years old.
- The onset of stuttering may be sudden or gradual.
- Stuttering is three times more common in boys than girls.
- Stuttering can vary in severity over time, and even throughout a day.
- Stuttering affects speakers of all languages and backgrounds.

### **What should I do if I think my child has a fluency disorder?**

If you are concerned about your child's fluency, you should contact a speech pathologist available at [www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au) . If your child is at school speak to the classroom teacher or principal about referral to a speech pathologist for an assessment. A speech pathologist is trained to assess your child's speech and recommend any assistance or therapy that may be required.

The Royal Children's Hospital Speech Pathology Department does not see children for assessment or treatment of fluency disorders but will refer you on to another service, such as La Trobe University or another suitable speech pathologist working in this area.

### **What can I do if my child is stuttering?**

If your child starts stuttering, it is recommended that you approach speech pathology services for assessment as soon as possible. While there is a possibility that your child may recover naturally, research shows that therapy has better outcomes for preschoolers than it does for older children.