

Stuttering

Stuttering is a speech problem that affects many young children, particularly those aged between two and four years.

About stuttering

Stuttering is a **speech problem** that makes it hard for children to speak smoothly.

Children most often stutter at the start of sentences, but stutters can also happen throughout sentences.

Children might also do nonverbal things when they stutter. For example, they might blink their eyes, grimace, make faces or clench their fists.

There are three different types of stuttering behaviour.

Repetitions

This is when a sound, part of a word, word or phrase is repeated over and over. For example:

- 'A a a and I want that one.'
- 'An an and I want that one.'
- 'And and and I want that one.'
- 'And I, and I, and I want that one.'

Prolongations

This is when a sound is stretched out – for example, 'Aaaaaaaaand I want that one'.

Blocks

This is when a child tries to speak and no sound comes out.

Causes of stuttering in children

We don't really know why stuttering happens.

It might be because there's an error or delay in the message that a child's brain sends to the muscles of her mouth when she needs to speak. This error or delay makes it hard for the child to coordinate her mouth muscles when she's talking, which results in stuttering.

Stuttering runs in families. This means a child is more likely to stutter if other people in his family stutter or have stuttered. But this doesn't mean that a child who has a family history of stuttering will definitely stutter.

Stuttering isn't caused by anxiety or stress. A child can't catch stuttering from somebody else. A child who stutters can't control it.

When stuttering starts

Stuttering often starts during the preschool years.

Most children start to stutter at **2-4 years**, when they're starting to combine words and make longer sentences. But some children don't start stuttering until later in childhood.

Stuttering can start suddenly – for example, a child might wake up one day with a stutter. It can also build up over time.

Stuttering: how much and how often children do it

How much and how often children stutter varies a lot. Some children stutter only occasionally throughout



did you know ?

More than 1 in 10 preschool-age children stutter.

Stuttering affects similar numbers of boys and girls aged 3-5 years.

Girls are more likely to recover from stuttering than boys.

the day. Other children stutter on almost every word they say.

Stuttering can also change a lot from day to day, week to week or month to month. Sometimes a child stops stuttering completely for days, weeks or months, and then starts stuttering again.

Parents say that particular situations can make their child's stuttering better or worse. For example, if a child is excited, tired or angry, she might stutter more.

Effects of stuttering

If your child stutters, he might feel frustrated or embarrassed because of the way other children react to the way he speaks. Your child might even avoid talking, or change what he wants to say.

But stuttering **doesn't actually affect preschoolers' development**. In fact, by four years of age, children who stutter might have better language skills and nonverbal skills than non-stuttering children. Preschoolers who stutter can have better health and the same social skills as non-stuttering children.

But **primary school children** who stutter are less likely to be thought of as leaders by their peers. Primary school children and teenagers who stutter might not want to join in with classroom discussions and are also more likely to be bullied compared with children who don't stutter.

Teenagers who stutter can develop anxiety as a result of the stuttering. They might feel self-conscious, have lower self-esteem or find some situations challenging – for example, speaking in public or starting an intimate relationship.

What you can do if your child stutters

If you notice that your child has a stutter, contact a [speech pathologist](#). The speech pathologist will assess your child's stuttering and work out whether to treat your child's stutter straight away, or whether to wait and check your child regularly.



Some children will grow out of stuttering on their own, but there is currently no way to know which children will do this. It's always best to consult a speech pathologist rather than assume your child's stuttering will go away by itself.

Stuttering treatment: the Lidcombe Program

The best treatment for stuttering in Australia is the **Lidcombe Program**. It's very good at reducing how much a child stutters, and it often stops stuttering altogether.

The Lidcombe Program works best with children younger than six years although it can be used with older children.

The Lidcombe Program is a therapy you and your child do at home in everyday situations. It basically involves giving your child positive feedback when she speaks without stuttering.

You and your child also visit a speech pathologist once a week. At these visits the speech pathologist teaches you how to give positive feedback effectively.

Treatment takes different amounts of time, depending on how severe a child's stuttering is. Your speech pathologist will work with you on finding ways to make the Lidcombe Program part of your everyday life, so you get the best possible outcome for your child.



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- ▶ Language development: an amazing journey
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- ▶ Talking: preschoolers

Web links

- ▶ Australian Stuttering Research Centre – Lidcombe Program
- ▶ South Western Sydney Local Health District – Stuttering Unit

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