

Recommendations for parents of children who are showing signs of stuttering:

THE CHILD

- Give your child a label for the stuttering moment. The child is then able to talk about the experience. Some parents use the expression that the child "got stuck" or showed "bumpy speech." Talking openly about stuttering is very powerful, and even children under three years of age may be able to understand this.
- A useful comparison is-- "If a child falls down, you wouldn't ignore it, would you? So why then, when children stutter, do we look away? Later, we can't talk about the problem?" Parents get so worried about the stuttering, and may send the message that they're actually ashamed of the child. The child picks up on this message via nonverbal signals.
- Once the child understands this label, the parent can "get stuck"-- use a similar stuttering pattern as the child while speaking, and then talk about the experience with the child. For example, the parent may say, "I want a glass of m-m-m-milk. Wow, I really got stuck on that one!".
- If your child does get stuck, stops talking and expresses frustration (e.g. "Mommy, I can't say it. I'm stuck."), you can reassure him, "I know honey, that was a hard one. You were really stuck. But Mommy is going to listen if you want to try again" or let him know that if he wants to try again later, you'll be ready to listen.
- If he starts to stutter and you actually don't understand what he is trying to say, repeat the part that you *did* understand, and ask him to clarify the specific portion of the message that you didn't understand. In this way, the child doesn't have to repeat the WHOLE thing all over again. And also, praise him for communicating some/most of the message successfully.

THE SPEAKING ENVIRONMENT

- Be careful NOT to interrupt the child, finish sentences, or break eye contact. Try to have a completely normal look on your face. What the child has to say is very important to you, and you are going to wait and listen for as long as needed for the child to finish, even if you know exactly what he's going to say.
- --Try to educate people close to your child about speaking pressure-- this includes fast-paced activities, fast speaking rate, threat of interruptions from other speakers. Questions for which there is only one right answer (like "What's your name?", "What color is this?") may also be difficult for your child to answer fluently.
- Try to educate others about not interrupting your child or finishing his sentences. Others may feel badly to see the child struggle. However, it's even harder for the child to be prevented from saying what he wants to say, even if he can't say it perfectly yet. -Focus on the MESSAGE, not the way he says it. Your child has something to say; acknowledge that.

ACTIVITIES

- Model slow speech, and try to slow down the environment around your child. You don't have to tell him to speak slowly, or breathe deeply. Put down your cellphone, turn off the computer or

TV, take a break from cooking or cleaning. If you hear stuttering, try as much as you can to slow down the interaction and the pace of activity at that moment.

- Try doing things with him where he doesn't have to talk. In these moments, you will both be free to enjoy the interaction and the activity itself. *No pressure. We'll just build with blocks, play legos, paint with water. I'm not going to ask you questions or expect you to tell me anything.*

Best of luck in helping your child develop fluent speech. Vanessa Nagy, MA, CCC-SLP