

For parents of school aged children and teens who stutter



As you may already know, stuttering commonly begins between the ages of 2-4, but not always. Some children will continue to stutter throughout their school years, adolescence and into adulthood. Your child may have been stuttering since they were a pre-schooler, their stuttering may have come and gone since they were younger or they may have developed a stutter more recently.

The causes and triggers of stuttering are complex, but we know that it has a physical basis with research suggesting there are subtle differences in the brains of people who stutter. About 60-70% of people who stutter have someone in their whānau or extended family who stutters or used to stutter.

Stuttering can vary a lot – some days your child may stutter more, and other days less. There's not always a reason for this, but increases in stuttering can be triggered by tiredness, strong emotions, certain situations or big changes in your child's life. Stuttering also changes over time, and may become more or less struggled or tense sounding.

How you respond to your child is likely to affect how they feel. So, if you're feeling worried or upset about their stutter, they might start to feel that way as well. It's hard as a parent not to worry but being open with your child about their stutter and having a relaxed attitude will give your child the clear message that they're so much more than their stutter.

Whether you're planning on getting involved in therapy or not, there's lots you can do at home to support your child. Here's some strategies that can be helpful:

Ask them first!

Everyone who stutters is different and will find different things helpful – if you want to know what's helpful for your child, just ask them. Be open to hearing what they've got to say and doing things differently – you may find out that what you're doing is unhelpful and that's ok. Praise your child for communicating what they need – this helps to build their self-advocacy skills.

Reacting to stuttering

It can be tough watching your child struggle in a moment of stuttering. If it makes you feel anxious, impatient or frustrated, try not to show it, as kids can pick up on your feelings. Our best advice is to be patient, and wait for them to finish speaking – even when they have longer stutters. Keep natural eye contact and avoid giving any advice.

Reduce the talking pressure

Parents naturally want to know what their kids have to say – but sometimes the way parents go about it can add to the pressure on their child to speak. Quick fire questions about their day, hurried conversations while you're chasing them out the door or asking them to tell their grandparents about their award, are all situations that could put pressure on your child – to speak quickly and on demand. Pay attention to how fast you speak with your child, sometimes slowing down yourself can help make it easier for your child.

It's not good, it's not bad...it's just stuttering

To make sense of the world we put things into categories and give them labels. The problem with that, is that we end up labelling a lot of things as 'bad' that aren't actually bad at all. Stuttering is just stuttering – sometimes it happens more and sometimes less. When stuttering increases, do your best to describe it as 'more' rather than 'bad'. Talking about stuttering in a neutral way can help your child to also think and feel more neutral about their stutter.

Similarly, there's no good and bad emotions – all emotions are normal and there's a time and place for all of them. It's ok if you or your child have difficult emotions about their stutter.

Talk about it

Stuttering doesn't need to be a secret! In fact, talking about it with your child and with others is how you normalise it. There are 70 million people in the world who stutter, yet not many people know enough about it. Growing up with a stutter can be challenging – so creating a community of people who know about and understand your child's stutter is important. Help your child build their confidence in talking about their stutter with others – you may like to practice at home together first.

Remember

Stuttering is no one's fault – you didn't do anything to cause your child's stutter. Similarly, your child has no control over the fact that they stutter, and that it fluctuates. Trying to control stuttering is hard work and comes at a cost, i.e. talking less, not saying exactly what they want to and having to focus hard on how they talk.

You have the power create a home environment that is safe and comfortable for your child to talk and stutter freely... and to just be themselves.



Did you know?

Stuttering often runs in families

Stuttering is not caused by nerves, but feeling nervous may increase stuttering

Stuttering commonly begins between the ages of 3-4 years

Approximately 1% of the population stutters, that's 70 million people in the world

There is no link between stuttering and intelligence

You can't catch stuttering from someone

Everyone is 'disfluent' at times, but not everyone stutters

Stuttering is often described as the feeling on loss of control or feeling stuck when talking

More males stutter than females