Supporting Children Who Stutter

Stuttering causes disruptions to the flow of speech. This includes repeating sounds or words, stretching out sounds, or difficulty starting a word. There may also be signs of effort or tension during speech.

When a child starts stuttering, the primary goal for families is to create a "communication sanctuary" - an environment that reduces the pressure to speak quick and ***maximises the joy of talking.***

Adjust Your Pace

Use Slow and Relaxed Speech:

Instead of telling your child to "slow down" (which can make them more self-conscious), model a relaxed, unhurried pace of speaking yourself.
Pausing frequently between your own sentences works wonders.

Increase Pause Time:

Wait a second or two before responding to your child. This reduces the overall pace of the conversation and shows them there is no rush to speak.

Modify Your Interaction

Reduce the Questions:

Avoid 'quick fire' questions ("What did you do? Who did you play with?") this puts high demand on their language formulation.
Instead, switch to descriptive phrases like ("Wow, that looks like a tall tower you built!"), and then give time for a response.

One-on-One Time:

Dedicate just 5 to 10 minutes a day of undivided, child-led attention.
Let them choose the activity, and simply follow their lead without directing or correcting them.

Empathy and Patience

Maintain Eye Contact:

When your child stutters, maintain natural eye contact and wait, patiently, for them to finish. Avoid looking away, showing annoyance & distress, or finishing their sentences for them.

Acknowledge the Struggle (If Needed):

If your child shows frustration, validate their feelings in a calm, matter-of-fact way:
"That was a tough word to get out, wasn't it? Thanks for telling me." This helps reduces the stigma and fear around stuttering.

Exploring Professional Help

It is entirely normal for preschoolers to go through periods of developmental dysfluency. However, it is a good idea to consult a speech pathologist if:

- The stuttering has lasted for more than a few months.
- You notice signs of physical tension (e.g., blinking, jaw tightness, or gasping).
- Your child is showing major frustration or avoids talking altogether.

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