Let's Talk About...

Stuttering or fluency problems

What is stuttering?

Stuttering is a speech disorder where a child has difficulty with the smooth flow of speech. People who stutter know what they want to say, but have trouble saying it because the flow of their speech is disrupted. It may sound like this:

- **Part or whole word repetitions:** 'm…m…m… mom' or 'can…can…can I go?'
- **Repeated phrases:** 'can I go…can I go…can I go to the store?'
- **Prolongations or stretched out sounds:** 'ssssssister' or 'whaaaat'
- **Blocks:** moments where no sounds come out when the person is trying to speak.

What causes stuttering?

The exact cause of stuttering is not known. Stuttering may be related to the brain activity that produces speech.

- Stuttering can run in families. If a parent or relative stutters, a child has a higher chance of stuttering than someone whose parents or relatives do not.
- Anxiety or stress can make stuttering worse.
- Stuttering is not caused by low intelligence, emotional problems, parenting style or personality type.

Facts about stuttering

- Most children begin stuttering between two and five years, when children start putting words together into short sentences.
- Stuttering may start suddenly or gradually.
- Boys stutter more commonly than girls. It is two times more common in boys than girls.
- Stuttering can vary in severity over time, and even throughout the day.
- Early treatment is best.
- Some children grow out of stuttering without treatment, but not all. It is not possible to know in advance whether your child will grow out of it on their own or not.
- Stuttering may become more severe over the years if it is not treated.
- Other factors can affect stuttering. For example, a child who stutters may stutter more when excited, tired, nervous, arguing, has limited time to speak, or is competing to be heard, or using complicated language.
- Some children who stutter may avoid speaking in particular situations (e.g. on the telephone), using certain words, or speaking with some people.

What should I do if my child stutters?

Do:

- Take time to listen to your child without distractions or competition from other family members. Listen to what your child says, not how he says it. Don't worry about the stutters.
- Let your child finish what they are saying. Do not finish words or sentences for him.
- Repeat or rephrase what your child says to show that you understood.
- Reassure your child if he is aware of the stutter and shows concern.
- Interact normally with your child. Don't make intrusive comments in an attempt to fix or treat the stutter. Comments like 'take a breath, slow down, etc.' rarely help, and can make a child feel more self conscious.

Do Not:

- Draw attention to your child's speech in front of others or put him or her in situations where speech is on display.

- Interrupt your child's speech or complete sentences for him or her.
- Criticize your child's speech.
- Tease or let others tease your child about his stutter.
- Let other people make comments or try to correct your child's speech.

When do I need to get help for my child?

Contact a speech language pathologist when:

- Your child becomes self conscious or fearful about talking
- If your child has stuttered more than six months
- Your child is five years or older
- Your child's stuttering has significant blocks with other body movement such as eye blinks, facial grimace, or he avoids words or speaking situations.

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