



Normal Dysfluency Versus Stuttering

Many children experience periods of dysfluency during the normal developmental process of speech and language. This happens most frequently around the ages of three to five years. Dysfluencies are interruptions in the normal flow and rhythm of speech, and they may present in the form of a sound, word, or phrase repetition.

The terms *Stuttering* and *Disfluency* describe two different types of interruption to the natural flow of speech. Children ages 5 and under commonly experience *normal disfluency*, while less experience *true stuttering*.

Normal disfluencies are easy and free of tension. They give us the sense that the child is thinking or figuring out their idea or sentence. They usually only have 2 to 4 units. Normal disfluencies are not rushed, forceful or overly rapid. They don't change in loudness, rhythm or pitch. Normal disfluencies tend to come and go. They are usually signs that a child is learning to use language in new ways. If disfluencies disappear for several weeks, then return, the child may just be going through another stage of learning.

Examples:

- Insertion of um, well, like (“I want the *um um um* bicycle”)
- Revision of a phrase (“you know what...*you know who* I saw today?”)
- Repetition of a phrase (“can I - *can I - can I* have some juice?”)
- Easy repetitions of a word or syllable (“we went *to to to* the pool *be-because* it's hot”)

True Stuttering is more likely to be tense or rushed. Stuttering give us the sense the speech is sticky or stuck. Stuttering is more likely to cause a word to be broken up.

Examples:

- Tense or irregular whole word repetitions (“*l-l-l-l-l-l* I want the blue one”)
- Tense or rushed part-word repetitions - especially if they change in rate, loudness or pitch or if they exceed 4 units (“I li-li-li-li-like going to the park”)
- Prolongation or stretching of a sound in a word (“*wwwwww*when is it my turn?”)
- Block where no voice comes out or airflow stops (“Can I go----outside?”)

Complete blocks of speech, increased consistency of stuttering, and frustration are signs that the problem may be more severe.