

Talking Fluency

What is talking fluency?



Fluency refers to the smoothness or flow with which sounds, syllables, words and phrases are said when talking. When a child is not speaking fluently terms like stuttering, stammering or cluttering are often used. A child's speech may also be dysfluent (lacking fluency) when they are trying to 'think of what to say' and are planning the words and sequence of words that they are going to use.

Why is talking fluency important?

Speaking fluently is important when relaying information and socialising. The more dysfluent speech is the more difficult is it for the speaker and the listener to engage in the conversation effectively and easily. It is important for a child to have fluent speech so that they are able to get their needs and wants met and to be able to effectively express their thoughts and ideas. It can be frustrating for the child who is not fluent when they cannot get their messages across.

At school age, having fluent speech is important when reading aloud and

answering questions in front of the class and making friendships. Children between the ages of 3 years and 5 years may go through a period of “normal” dysfluency. This is usually characterised by the repetition of whole words and the beginning sounds in words (e.g. “I I I want a biscuit”). This is thought to be due to a child having a “language burst” where they are acquiring new language quickly and they need more time to formulate and produce utterances. During normal dysfluency, the child tends not to realise they are being dysfluent and the dysfluencies do not dominate the speech (i.e. there are approximately 5 or less dysfluencies occurring per 100 words).

What are the building blocks necessary to develop talking fluency?

- **Hearing**
- **Attention and concentration:** Sustained effort, doing activities without distraction and being able to hold that effort long enough to get the task done.
- **Expressive (using) language:** The use of language through speech, sign or alternative forms of communication to communicate wants, needs, thoughts and ideas.
- **Receptive (understanding) language:** Comprehension of language.
- **Play skills:** Voluntary engagement in self motivated activities that are normally associated with pleasure and enjoyment where the activities may be, but are not necessarily, goal oriented.
- **Articulation:** The clarity of speech sounds and spoken language.

How can you tell if there are problems with talking fluency?

If a child has difficulties with talking fluency they might:

- Show frustration because they can't get their words out or talking takes a lot of effort.
- Seem to get stuck on words a lot of the time.
- Repeat sounds, syllables or phrases regularly in their speech.

- Have lots of stops and starts in speech (e.g. there is a lack of “flow”) and their speech is difficult to follow and understand.
- Avoids certain words and/or phrases because they might have difficulty saying them or they get stuck on those words.
- Avoid talking because they are having difficulty communicating fluently with others.
- Show behaviours like foot tapping, blinking or their slapping leg when trying to get a word out.
- Say ‘um’, ‘er’ or ‘ah’ a lot whilst thinking about what they want to say.
- Regularly rephrase sentences whilst talking.

What other problems can occur when a child has talking fluency difficulties?

When a child has talk fluency difficulties, they might also have difficulties with:

- Confidence and self esteem.
- Social skills and relating to others appropriately.
- Frustration (e.g. the child cannot “get out” what they want to say).
- Completing oral based academic tasks at school (e.g. the child refraining from speaking in front of the class).
- Planning and sequencing (sequential steps of task performance)
- Articulation (clarity of speech)
- Using words and language (expressive language)
- Understanding language (receptive language)

What can be done to improve talking fluency?

- **Speech Therapy assessment:** It is very important to get early intervention for to help a child who has a stutter.
- **Work collaboratively** and liaise with pre-school or school staff around the nature of the fluency difficulty. Set up joint communication goals and develop strategies to help support the child’s fluency within the preschool or classroom setting.
- **Do not put the child on show:** Try and avoid situations where the child

is put 'on the spot' to answer questions, especially in the presence of others or those with whom they are not familiar as this can lead to performance anxiety and increase the stutter.

- **Model a slower speech rate:** Speak using a slower rate and pause regularly when you are talking with the child. The child will follow the rate of speech that you are modelling, which will assist their fluency.
- **Reduce background noise** at home when (e.g. turn off the radio or television) when talking with the child).
- **Don't interrupt:** Even if the child is speaking dysfluently (stuttering), try not to interrupt what they are saying by saying "slow down" or "start again".
- **Avoid** telling the child to slow down, take a breath and think about what they are saying before they say it as this can lead to added anxiety.

What activities can help improve talking fluency?

- **Face-to-face:** Listen to the child when they are speaking, make sure you are face to face with them and let them know that they have lots of time to get their message across and that you are listening.
- **Reduce questions:** Try not to ask too many questions as this often puts a child 'on the spot' and they can feel under pressure to answer.
- **Taking turns:** Encourage all members of the house to take turns when talking together as children are more likely to be fluent if they are not worried about being interrupted.
- **Talking time:** Set aside a "special time" each day where it is just you and the child interacting together. Complete activities, such as playing with a toy, reading a book and/or talking about what they have done during the day.
- **Listen to the child talking** ensuring that you are listening to the *content* of what they are saying and not *how* they are saying it. Be aware of not reacting negatively (e.g. through facial expression, gesture, getting tense) to any dysfluent speech you may hear.

Why should I seek therapy if I notice difficulties with talking fluency in my child?

Therapeutic intervention to help a child with talking fluency difficulties is important to:

- Improve the child's ability to speak without repeating words and sounds.
- Improve the child's ability to engage with peers and adults in interactions.
- Help reduce frustration in the child who struggles verbalising their message in the home and/or school environment.
- Help increase confidence and self esteem.

If left untreated what can difficulties with talking fluency lead to?

When children have difficulties with talking fluency, they might also have difficulties with:

- Forming friendships and engaging in positive social interactions with others.
- Engaging with unfamiliar individuals in everyday situations (e.g. asking for assistance in a shop, placing an order at a restaurant, talking on the phone).
- Communicating with others in the classroom which can contribute to academic under-performance.
- Communicating with others in social settings (playground, play dates) which can contribute to social isolation and poor self esteem.

What type of therapy is recommended for talking fluency difficulties?

If your child has difficulties with fluency, it is recommended they consult a Speech Therapist.

Contact us today to make an initial enquiry or book an assessment for your child
on 1800 KID SENSE (1800 543 736)

