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## *Stuttering*

Learning to talk is a rocky road, and just as a babies wobble when walking, they may also stutter when talking. Almost one out of 20 children will stutter at some point. Boys tend to stutter more than girls. Most children who stutter as preschoolers outgrow it before reaching school age.

Stuttering can mean a number of different things. Most children will repeat or prolong sounds, syllables, and words, hesitate between syllables or words, or insert "ums" as they struggle to put their thoughts into words. This is usually harmless and will often occur when your child is excited or stressed.

As long as a child's stuttering occurs at the beginning of a word or is one word at the beginning of a sentence, such as "but-but-but" or "b-b-but", and is not accompanied by distorted facial expressions, it is probably nothing to worry about.

A professional evaluation may be needed if a child stutters in the middle of a word, stutters for more than two or three months, or appears tense or frustrated. Therapy can be very helpful in both teaching a child to speak smoothly and to prevent her from becoming frustrated or afraid to talk.

If a child stutters, try not to make him or her nervous by calling attention to it. Refrain from telling a child to "start over", "stop and think", or "slow down". Listen patiently instead, and allow the time needed to get the words out. Remember, the real problem is the child is thinking faster than he or she can speak, and practice is the solution. One of the best ways to help your child's speech practice is by singing together. While singing, children don't have to think about what they are saying, so singing together is really a wonderful form of family-based speech therapy!

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