

What is Stuttering?

- Stuttering occurs in all parts of the world, across all cultures, religions and socioeconomic groups.
- Stuttering takes many different forms and each person who stutters shows slightly different features.
- One common feature is its unpredictability and variability. This can lead to frustration for the person who stutters and their family. Many parents describe how phases of stuttering are followed by a fluent period that may last for weeks - naturally this adds to the dilemma of when or whether to ask for help.
- Parents often report that there is no obvious pattern to the stuttering. For example, sometimes it's more apparent when the child is tired, but not always, sometimes it's better on holidays, but not consistently. There are no hard and fast rules.
- Characteristics of stuttering (do not all have to be present):
 - Repetition of whole words (e.g. "and, and, and, then I left").
 - Repetition of single sounds (e.g. "c-c-come h-h-here").
 - Prolonging of sounds (e.g. "ssssssometimes I go out").
 - Blocking of sounds, where the mouth is in position, but no sound comes out
 - Facial tension - in the muscles around the eyes, nose, lips or neck.
 - Extra body movements may occur as the child attempts to 'push' the word out stamping the feet, shifting body position or tapping with the fingers.
 - The breathing pattern may be disrupted. For example, the child may hold his breath while speaking or take an exaggerated breath before speaking.
 - Generally the flow of speech is interrupted and this may cause distress to the speaker and the listener.
- Some children try to minimize or hide their difficulties with fluency by ...
 - Avoiding or changing words - the child may say "I've forgotten what I was going to say", or may switch to another word when he begins to stutter (e.g. "I played with my br- br- br... him on Saturday.").
 - Avoiding certain situations - for instance, speaking in a group or to new people.
 - Becoming very quiet

Reference: Adapted from - "What is Stammering?" <http://www.stutteringcentre.org>. Reprinted with permission from The Michael Palin Centre, The Association for Research into Stuttering in Childhood.