

Childhood Onset Fluency Disorder



Childhood-onset fluency disorder, commonly known as stuttering, is a communication disorder where speech flow is disrupted by repetitions (sounds, syllables, words), prolongations, or blocks, often starting between ages 2 and 7, and can cause significant anxiety or

communication limitations at home, in school and social scenarios. It involves speech disfluencies like sound repetitions, long pauses, or physical tension during speaking, and while often genetic, its exact cause involves a mix of genetic, neurophysiological, and developmental factors. Early intervention with speech-language pathologists (SLPs) is crucial, focusing on fluency techniques, parent coaching, and managing emotional impacts. Post Covid 19 Pandemic there has been an approximately 400% increase in fluency referrals especially for boys. Let's learn more!

Symptoms & Characteristics

- **Speech Patterns:** Repetition of sounds/syllables, broken words, long pauses, prolongations, or whole-word repetitions (e.g., "b-b-ball," "baaaaaall," "ball").
- **Physical Tension:** Excessive tension in facial muscles, lips, or jaw during speech.
- **Behavioral Signs:** Eye blinking, tics, lip shaking, or other motor movements accompanying speech.
- **Emotional Impact:** Frustration, embarrassment, anxiety, or fear of speaking, limiting social participation.

Causes & Risk Factors

- **Genetics:** Stuttering can be genetic from your matriarchal or patriarchal side of the family. The SLP will ask any family history regarding speech and language.
- **Brain Function:** Differences in brain areas processing speech and language are changing during the pre-pubescent years (9-12 years) impacts fluency which may be why the incidence of stuttering is more common in boys.

- **Developmental Factors:** May co-occur with other speech/language delays or diagnosis such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism, Anxiety Disorder, Oppositional Defiance Disorder or Learning Disabilities.
- **Triggers:** Stress, anxiety, or feeling self-conscious can increase disfluencies. Adverse childhood experiences such as witnessing domestic violence, neighborhood violence, abuse or neglect can also impact fluency in boys.

When to Seek Help (Signs of Persistent Stuttering)

- Stuttering lasts over 6 months or worsens as the child grows.
- Includes muscle tension or physical struggle when talking.
- Causes significant distress or interferes with school/social life.
- Child shows fear or avoids speaking situations.
- After traumatic brain injury

Treatment & Management

- **Speech-Language Pathology (SLP):** The primary treatment, using techniques like fluency shaping and stuttering modification.
- **Parent Training:** Parents learn to create a supportive, relaxed communication environment and are provided support services such as parent support groups, camps or extra-curricular activities for boys who stutter.
- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** Helps older children manage anxiety and negative feelings.
- **Early Intervention:** Key for best outcomes, often stopping stuttering within 1-2 years with therapy.

