

DYSFLUENT SPEECH

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Introduction

When we say that someone speaks fluently, it means that the person's speech flows easily. Sounds combine into syllables, syllables blend into words and words link into sentences with little effort. When someone's speech is 'dysfluent', it is uneven and does not flow smoothly. So, a **dysfluency** is a break in the smooth, meaningful flow of speech.

All of us have occasional interruptions in our speech. Talking is not automatic. To communicate new thoughts and feelings, we create sentences we have never spoken before. Speaking is a creative, decision-making process.

What speech behaviours are dysfluencies?

1. *Repetition*

People may repeat individual sounds or syllables at the beginning of words ("The baby ate the s-s-soup). Some may repeat whole words ("The-The baby ate the soup"). Also, they may repeat more than one word in a phrase or sentence ("The baby-The baby ate the soup").

2. *Interjection*

Interjections are extra sounds, syllables or words that add no meaning to the message. The most common interjections are "uh" and "um" ("The baby um ate the soup"). Words and phrases such as "well", "like" and "you know" are considered interjections.

3. Pauses

Pauses or silent intervals between words may be considered a type of dysfluency, depending upon when they occur and how long they last. Pauses are used to separate phrases (“The baby ate the soup [pause] and then went to sleep”). But sometimes, speakers tend to pause within a phrase (“The [pause] baby ate the soup”). These pauses can be considered dysfluencies especially if they last for more than 2 seconds.

4. Revision

People sometimes revise what they have just said. They may stop in the middle of a sentence and begin again in a new direction. Revisions can happen in pronunciation (“The bady-baby ate the soup”); grammar (“The baby eated-ate the soup”); or word choice (“The daddy-the baby ate the soup”).

5. Prolongation

Sounds or syllables may be prolonged or made longer (“The baaaaby ate the soup”). There could also be a break in the word (“The ba-by ate the soup”). Some tension in the tongue, lip and mouth may accompany these words.

What dysfluencies are common or “normal”?

Children seem to be most dysfluent during the preschool years. Generally revisions, interjections, word and phrase repetitions are very common in children’s speech. Most children show each type of dysfluency from time to time. This is considered to be “normal” dysfluency.

However, there are some warning signs that may indicate a person is experiencing a dysfluency problem and requires help:

- a. Frequent sound and syllable repetition
- b. Frequent prolongation of sounds that become longer in duration
- c. Rises in pitch or loudness of voice during the prolongation of sounds
- d. Tension and struggle behavior during the prolongation of sounds
- e. A look of fear in the person’s face while saying certain words
- f. Avoidance of or delay in saying certain words
- g. Odd facial or body movements accompany the groping period: for example, twitching of the eye, nose, jerking of the jaw etc,

If you are concerned that you or someone you know may have some of the signs stated above, don't hesitate to see a speech language pathologist for an assessment. Dysfluent speech behavior may be successfully reduced with early diagnosis and treatment.

