

Health nurse – how to deal with stuttering in a child!

Strengthen your skills

- Increase your knowledge and skills on stuttering by attending the free training Änkyttävä asiakas terveydenhoitajan vastaanotolla (in Finnish) (www.temposhop.fi)

Recognise stuttering

- It is important for the nurse to discuss speech development and fluency, even if no stuttering is heard during the visit. Use the follow-up form to remind you of important questions!

Initial information for the family

- Give parents information about stuttering and reassure the worried parent without downplaying the issue. Give the parent written materials on stuttering (www.tempokeskus.fi) and direct the parent to the free Kohti Voimaa self-help program (in Finnish) (www.temposhop.fi). Remember also the more extensive online rehabilitation program Voima (in Finnish), which provides the family with information and tools to support their child's speech fluency.

Referral to treatment

- Sometimes the referral to speech therapy is made as soon as the stuttering comes up during a visit to the nurse. Sometimes you can monitor the situation for three months, for example, and make the referral later. The follow-up form will help you to understand when a referral to speech therapy is appropriate. Many families can also benefit from the Voima online rehabilitation program (in Finnish).

For health nurses:



For families:



For early childhood education and care:



Rehabilitation development project 2022-2025 supported by The Social Insurance Institute of Finland (Kela):
Improving access to care for children with stuttering.
Voimavarakeskus Tempo Oy. Stuttering Resource Center Tempo.

Recognising and monitoring stuttering in the health nurse's office

age: 2–6
years

The form is intended to support the health nurse in recognising stuttering. The themes of the form can be discussed with the parent. You can record the features of the stuttering on the form and, if you continue to follow up, you can also record the findings from the follow-up visit on the same form.

Recognising speech disfluency

What is the child's speech like? How does the child express themselves? Does the child's speech flow smoothly? Has this always been the case, or have there been periods or situations where the child's speech has been disfluent or the child has stuttered?

☐

speech has always been fluent

☐

there have been disfluencies in speech

If the child's speech has always been fluent, there is no need to continue the questionnaire.

Beginning of stuttering

	date of visit: observations	date of visit: observations
When did the stuttering first start?		
How does the stuttering manifest? What is it typically like? What is it like at its most difficult?		
How has the stuttering varied since it started? Has stuttering become milder or more difficult?		

If it has been 6 months since the child's stuttering started, make a referral to a speech therapist.

In any case, refer the family to the free Kohti Voimaa self-help program (in Finnish) (www.temposhop.fi) and provide the parent with the written materials on supporting the child's fluency (www.tempokeskus.fi)

If the child is in early childhood education and care, you can pass on information about free training (www.temposhop.fi) to help the staff to support the child's fluency in everyday situations.

Child's reactions to speaking

How does the child react when their speech is not fluent; how does the child behave when speaking is difficult?		
Does stuttering affect the child's participation and courage to speak? How?		
What does the child say about their stuttering and speaking?		

If the child reacts negatively to stuttering, for example if they become frustrated or avoid talking, the family should be referred to speech therapy immediately, regardless of how long it has been since the stuttering started.

Parental concern

How concerned is the parent about the child's stuttering? on a scale of 0=not at all concerned, 10=very concerned		
How does the stuttering make the parent feel?		
How does the parent feel they can help the child?		

If the parents are very concerned about their child's stuttering, make a referral to speech therapy immediately.

The free Kohti Voimaa self-help program (in Finnish) can help the parents. Remember also the extensive online rehabilitation program Voima (in Finnish), which provides the parents with a lot of information and tools to support their child's speech fluency.

You can pass on information to early childhood education and care about the free training tailored to them to help them to support the child's fluency in everyday situations.

You can continue monitoring changes in speech fluency and arrange a follow-up visit with the family to the child health clinic in 3-6 months if all of the following criteria are met:

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less than 6 months have passed since the onset of the child's stuttering

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the child does not react negatively to stuttering and it does not affect their participation in different speaking situations

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the parent is not yet concerned

Identifying and referring stuttering for treatment at the school nurse's office

age: 7–
13 years

This form is intended to support the school nurse in identifying stuttering in school-aged children. The topics on the form can be discussed with the child. The form can be used to document the current situation, and the questions can be revisited at the next health check-up.

Bringing up the topic of speaking

Discuss speaking with the child. You can ask, for example, whether speaking feels easy for them, whether others can understand them clearly, or whether they are concerned about their speech. If the child brings up any speech-related issues, it is worth asking further questions to determine whether the issue is stuttering or something else. The same topics can also be discussed with the child's parent.

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Speech has always been fluent and easy

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There have been disfluencies in speech

If the child's speech has always been fluent, there is no need to proceed with the questionnaire.

Referring a school-aged child to a speech therapist

Stuttering is often a persistent feature in a school-aged child's speech. However, it may vary significantly in both frequency and severity over time. At times, the stuttering may almost disappear, only to return with increased intensity. For this reason, it is important to bring up the topic during school health check-ups. The amount of stuttering heard in speech does not necessarily reflect how disturbing the child experiences it or how it affects their participation in speaking situations. Therefore, there can be several different reasons for referring a child to speech therapy. The questions on the next page will help guide your assessment.

Refer the child to speech therapy if **any** of the following apply:

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The child's stuttering is frequent, and producing speech requires significant effort

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The child reacts to the stuttering, showing frustration, shame, or other negative emotions

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The stuttering restricts the child's participation and leads to avoidance (e.g., reduced willingness to answer in class, read aloud, or talk with friends; the child changes difficult words to easier ones or stops speaking altogether)

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The child's parents are concerned about the situation and feel they lack adequate means to help their child with stuttering

Stuttering at present

	date of visit: observations	date of visit: observations
How does the stuttering manifest? What is it typically like? What is it like at its worst?		
How does the stuttering vary? Has it become easier or more difficult?		
How severe does the child currently rate their stuttering? (0 = not difficult at all, 10 = extremely difficult)		

The child's reactions to speaking

How disturbing does the child find the stuttering? (0 = not disturbing at all, 10 = extremely disturbing)		
What factors influence how disturbing the child finds the stuttering?		
How does the child feel when they stutter?		

Impact of stuttering on participation

Does stuttering affect how much the child speaks in different situations? In what way and in which situations?		
Does the child express themselves despite the stuttering? Do they speak more briefly than they would like or sometimes leave things unsaid?		

Parental concern

How concerned is the parent about the child's stuttering and its impact? (0 = not concerned at all, 10 = extremely concerned)		
What kind of feelings does the stuttering evoke in the parent?		
How does the parent feel they are able to support their child?		

Referral to speech therapy is not always necessary. In all cases, guide the child and parents to explore the free Kohti Kasvua self-help program available at www.temposhop.fi. Inform the child's teacher about the free training course Koululaisen änkytys (www.temposhop.fi), which supports teachers in understanding and addressing stuttering in everyday school situations.

