

## Word-final dysfluency - Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is meant by word-final dysfluency?**

Word-final dysfluencies are interruptions in the flow of speech that affect the last part of a word, but not the first sound or sounds of the word. This pattern of dysfluency contrasts with developmental stammering where sounds at the beginning of words are repeated.

### **What does it sound like?**

Word-final repetitions follow a complete production of a word. Repetitions may sound like an echo to the listener, eg. 'I'm going to the shop op op'. There may be one or more repetitions of the final sound or syllable.

### **Is it a type of stammering?**

The World Health Organisation defines stammering as "a disorder in the rhythm of speech where the individual knows what he/she wants to say but at the time is unable to say it because of an involuntary repetition, prolongation (where the sound is stretched) or block; usually occurring on the first sound of a word at the start of a sentence."

Using this definition word-final dysfluency would not be classified as stammering, as it occurs after the individual has said what he/she wants to say.

### **What do we know about the cause of this dysfluency?**

It is unclear why some children will go through a phase of repeating the final sound(s) of words. There are theories that children are using the repetitions like 'fillers' for thinking time (where we might use 'err' and 'um'). Others suggest the child might have been trying to correct or clarify their pronunciation of final sounds.

### **Are word-final dysfluencies unusual?**

Word-final dysfluencies are considered more unusual than stammering, although we believe cases may be under-reported. This may be because there is usually no associated tension or struggle evident in the child's speech and because dysfluency occurring at the beginning of words is more likely to interrupt the normal flow of conversation for the listener.

### **Is treatment necessary?**

Anxiety and distress in the child are key indicators for treatment in stammering, however In most cases of word-final dysfluency the child is

unconcerned and often not aware. Those cases which have been discussed in medical journals and our own clinical experience indicates that word-final dysfluency occurs without any observable signs of increased muscle tension or avoidance strategies (changing words, avoiding difficult situations etc). Cases resolve naturally over a period of time, from a few months to several years. (There are no cases reported of adults with this type of dysfluency, unlike developmental stammering which can persist into adulthood).

### **What can you I do to help?**

- Try to ignore the child's dysfluency and don't draw attention to it. Don't ask them to say it 'properly' or repeat it, as this will make them aware of what they're doing
- Show your child you are interested in what they say, not how they say it.
- If your child notices the dysfluencies and wants to know why it's happening, go ahead and reassure them that lots of children sometimes go through a phase of dysfluency which resolves naturally in time.
- If you notice that your child is stammering (repeating sounds at the beginning of words, usually at the start of sentence) ask for a referral to a Speech and Language Therapist, as early treatment before the age of 6 years is recommended.