Many preschoolers go through times when they have difficulty talking. They may repeat words and phrases and appear to be stuttering. This often occurs when a child’s language is expanding, between the ages of 3 and 5 years. Most children outgrow this without any further stuttering. However, for some children, the stuttering may continue and treatment or therapy may be needed.

Children who are at risk for continuing to stutter should get an evaluation from a speech/language pathologist.

A child who is at risk may:

- Say partial word repetitions, with at least 3 repetitions (“ba-ba-ba-ball”).
- Make a sound longer than necessary (“sssssssun”).
- Produce more than 3 whole word repetitions with tension in the voice (“I want-want-want-want to go.”).
- Have repetitions, part word and whole word, that are not rhythmical, and the child shows tension in his face.
- Say a word that gets "stuck" and no sound or word comes out.
- Substitute an "uh" sound for another vowel in a word (“tuh-tuh-tuh-table”).
- Say that they can't get their words out.
- Distort his face from tension or look worried.

The child is also more at risk if there is a family history of stuttering or if the child has other communication concerns.

Increased anxiety and stress in the child’s natural environment can further contribute to stuttering risk factors. Therefore, should therapy be needed, it is very important for the family to participate. Children like to imitate their parents. With preschool children, parents need to be trained to learn new communication styles. The speech/language pathologist will demonstrate during therapy. The parents will practice these skills during therapy. As the parents use these skills, the child will imitate them. It will be helpful for the child's other caregivers to learn the new communication style also.