



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

# Early stuttering and anxiety: Piecing together the evidence to inform clinical practice

Dr Elaina Kefalianos

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Stuttering in preschool children

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# Overview

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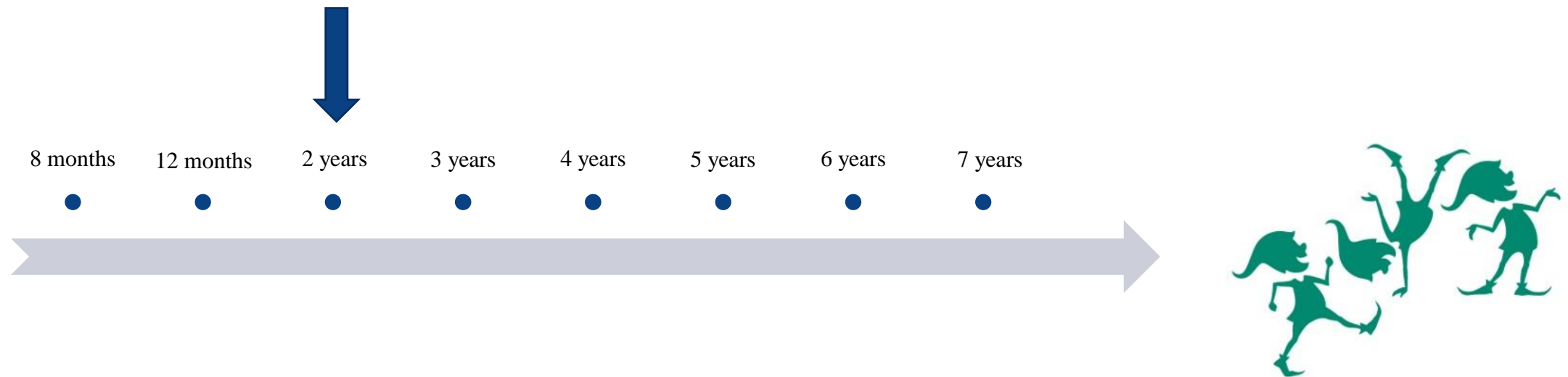
- Does anxiety contribute to the cause of stuttering?
- How early does anxiety emerge during early stuttering?
- Does anxiety resolve with early stuttering intervention?
- Clinical implications for working with children who stutter



# Does anxiety contribute to the cause of stuttering?

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- **ELVS** longitudinal, prospective study of an Australian community cohort
- **Temperament dimension ‘approach’** precursor to development of anxiety

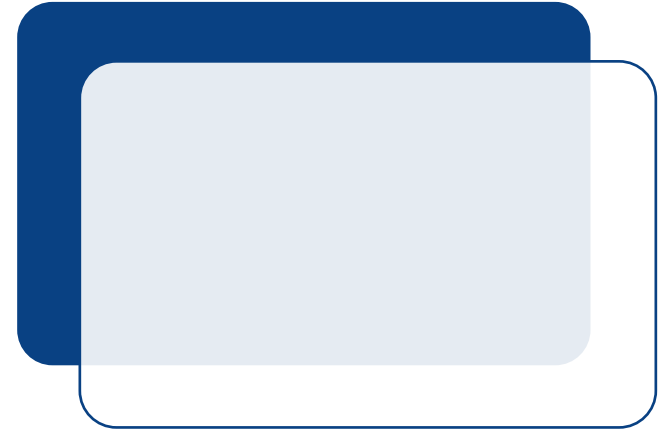
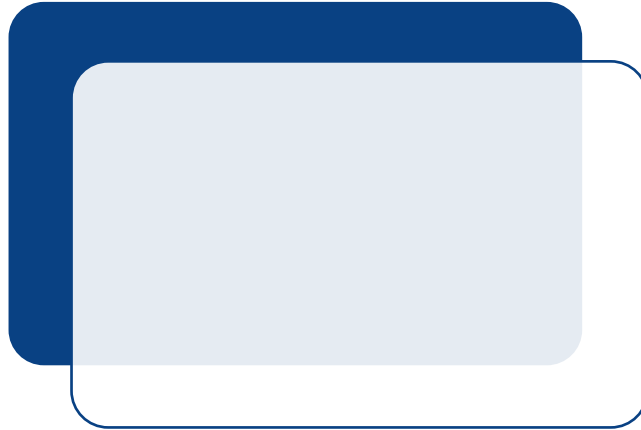




# Piecing together the evidence

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**Anxiety does  
not cause  
stuttering**



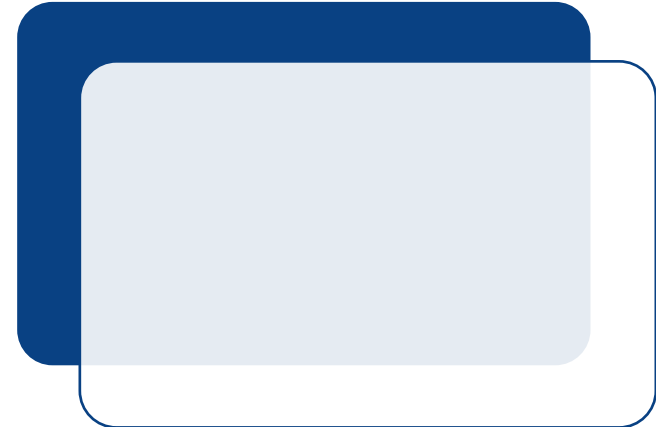


# Piecing together the evidence

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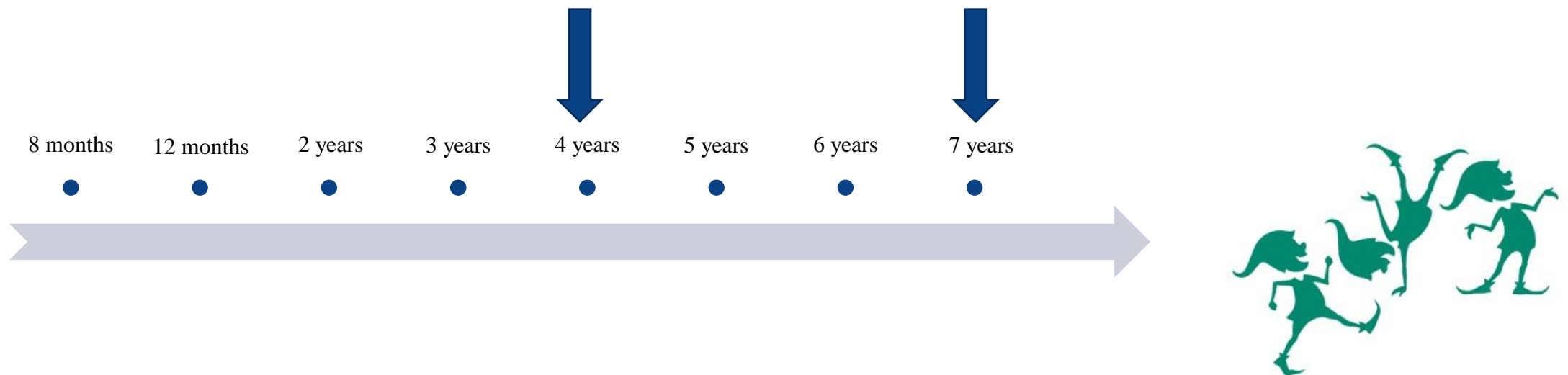
**When does  
anxiety begin to  
emerge?first**



# When does anxiety begin to emerge during early stuttering?

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- **Short Temperament Scale;** temperament dimension ‘approach’
- **Pediatric Quality of Life Inventory Parent-Proxy Report;** quality of life
- **Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire;** behavioral & emotional problems





# When does anxiety begin to emerge during early stuttering?

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- Conflicting results from other population studies
- Emotional & behavioral difficulties reported from 3 years
- Children who stutter more likely to be unhappy, worry & have emotional difficulties
- Evidence that preschool children can develop anxious symptoms close to onset



# When does anxiety begin to emerge during early stuttering?

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- Anxious symptoms develop in **some** child who stutter
- Anxiety screening for **all** children who stutter
- Management of anxious symptoms for **some** children who stutter





# Potential signs of early mental health issues

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Frustration

Withdrawal

Talking less

Negative comments about their communication

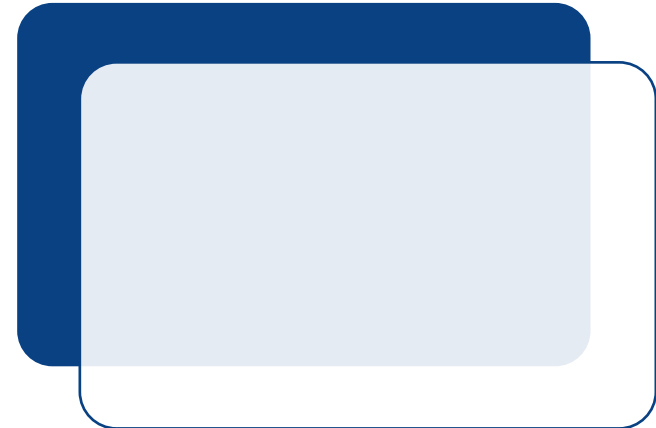


# Piecing together the evidence

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**Anxiety does  
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**Anxiety can  
develop close to  
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# Piecing together the evidence

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**Anxiety does  
not cause  
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**Anxiety can  
develop close to  
stuttering onset**

**Does anxiety  
resolve with  
treatment?**



# Anxiety & early stuttering intervention

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- Can early intervention cause anxiety?
- Do anxious symptoms resolve with early intervention?
- **Lidcombe Program:** psychologically safe, possible psychologically beneficial
- **Lidcombe Program & RESTART:** improved psychological wellbeing & communication attitudes



# Summary

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**Anxiety does not  
cause stuttering**

**Risk factors are  
present from an  
early age**

**Early intervention  
is psychologically  
safe; may resolve  
anxious symptoms**



# Screening for anxious symptoms

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## **Case history**

- How does your child react when they stutter?
- Does your child comment on their talking?
- Do other people comment on your child's stutter?
- Has your child's behavior changed since they started stuttering?

## **Preschool Anxiety Scale**

## PRESCHOOL ANXIETY SCALE (Parent Report)



Your Name:  Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Child's Name:

Below is a list of items that describe children. For each item please circle the response that best describes your child. Please circle the 4 if the item is **very often true**, 3 if the item is **quite often true**, 2 if the item is **sometimes true**, 1 if the item is **seldom true** or if it is **not true at all** circle the 0. Please answer all the items as well as you can, even if some do not seem to apply to your child.

	Not True at All	Seldom True	Sometimes True	Quite Often True	Very Often True
1 Has difficulty stopping him/herself from worrying.....	0	1	2	3	4
2 Worries that he/she will do something to look stupid in front of other people.....	0	1	2	3	4
3 Keeps checking that he/she has done things right (e.g., that he/she closed a door, turned off a tap).....	0	1	2	3	4
4 Is tense, restless or irritable due to worrying.....	0	1	2	3	4
5 Is scared to ask an adult for help (e.g., a preschool or school teacher).....	0	1	2	3	4
6 Is reluctant to go to sleep without you or to sleep away from home.....	0	1	2	3	4
7 Is scared of heights (high places).....	0	1	2	3	4
8 Has trouble sleeping due to worrying.....	0	1	2	3	4
9 Washes his/her hands over and over many times each day.....	0	1	2	3	4
10 Is afraid of crowded or closed-in places.....	0	1	2	3	4
11 Is afraid of meeting or talking to unfamiliar people.....	0	1	2	3	4
12 Worries that something bad will happen to his/her parents.....	0	1	2	3	4
13 Is scared of thunder storms.....	0	1	2	3	4
14 Spends a large part of each day worrying about various things.....	0	1	2	3	4
15 Is afraid of talking in front of the class (preschool group) e.g., show and tell.....	0	1	2	3	4
16 Worries that something bad might happen to him/her (e.g., getting lost or kidnapped), so he/she won't be able to see you again.....	0	1	2	3	4
17 Is nervous of going swimming.....	0	1	2	3	4

# Informational counselling

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- Anxiety does not cause stuttering
- Anxiety can exacerbate stuttering
- Monitor child reactions
- Monitor other people's reactions







# Management

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- Evidence based stuttering intervention
- Referral to psychologist (if indicated)
- SLP strategies for social-emotional support

# Management – SLP strategies

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Gradually reduce negative beliefs and increase self-confidence

## **DO**

- Exposure to tasks perceived as difficult
- Encourage brave behaviors
- Focus on strengths

## **DON'T**

- Excessive reassurance
- Permitting avoidance





# Summary

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- Some, but not all, children are affected by stuttering
- Risk factors can be present close to stuttering onset
- SLPs should:
  - assess all children who stutter for anxious symptoms
  - provide some management of anxious symptoms (as indicated)



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# Thank you

[ekefalianos@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:ekefalianos@unimelb.edu.au)

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