

Children's Therapy Team

Speech and Language Therapy Advice Sheet

Supporting young children who stammer.

Facts about stammering;

- Stammering is when words and sounds are repeated (repetitions), made longer (prolongations) or get stuck (blocking). You may notice other features as part of the stammer such as clenching fists and head or body movements.
- Up to 8% of children will stammer at some point and this often occurs between the ages of 2 and 5, when a child's speech and language skills are rapidly developing.
- Stammering can come and go. A child's stammer may vary depending on lots of factors including the situation, the person/people they are speaking to, how they feel or what they are trying to say.
- It's ok to stammer. Having a stammer shouldn't hold your child/young person back from achieving their goals.

Top tips for supporting children who stammer;

Slow down your own rate of speech: This helps to create a relaxed environment and reduce any time pressure your child may feel. You do not need to ask your child to slow down or take a deep breath.

Pause: Pausing regularly when talking helps to slow your speech down and create a more relaxed feeling in the conversation. Pausing before answering a question also shows your child that it's ok to think/take time before responding to a question.

Get down to your child's level: This shows your child that you are interested in what they are saying and that they have your full attention when they are talking.

Ask fewer questions: Try making a comment instead of asking a question as this will reduce pressure on your child to give a response.

Keep your language simple: Children are more likely to use language within their ability level if simple language is modelled by the adult.

Praise your child: Using specific praise where possible and encouraging your child to find their own strengths will help to build their confidence.

Consistent routines: Try to keep routines such as bedtimes as consistent as possible as this will help to reduce tiredness, which can impact on fluency.

Special time: Have one to one time with your child where there are no distractions and they don't feel the need to compete for attention.

Listen to what your child is saying rather than how they are saying it.

Taking turns to speak: It is helpful if all family members understand the importance of taking turns to speak.

Teasing and bullying: It can really knock a child's confidence if they hear themselves being copied/mimicked when stammering, even when it's not meant to be unkind. It is important for any teasing/bullying to be dealt with immediately.

Be open about stammering: It's ok to talk about stammering. If your child comments or appears distressed when stammering, it's important to acknowledge it and reassure them by saying comments such as; "I can see it's a tricky word, I'm listening".

Be positive: Be mindful about the language you use when talking about stammering. Avoid using negative language such as 'worse' or 'bad' e.g. "his speech is bad today", as this can suggest to the child that stammering is negative.

If you have tried using these strategies and you are still concerned about your child's communication you can;

- Look on our website for the 'Quick Reference Guide'. This will guide you to the best time to refer your child to Speech and Language Therapy. The referral forms and further advice sheets are also available on the website <https://www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/childrens-centre/your-childs-hospital-journey/therapy-services/childrens-therapy-referral/>

Further useful information can be found on the following websites:

- www.stamma.org
- www.actionforstammeringchildren.org
- www.michaelpalencentreforstammering.org