



Speech and Language Therapy Advice Sheet

Supporting older 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.
- About 1 in every 12 children will stammer, most frequently between the ages of 2 and 5. This often occurs when a child's speech and language skills are rapidly developing. Some children will start stammering after the age of 5.
- Stammering can come and go. A stammer may vary depending on lots of factors including the situation, who they are speaking to, how they feel or what they are trying to say. Stammering is not caused by shyness or nerves.
- Stammering and stuttering mean the same thing.
- Parents do not cause stammering but how a stammer is responded to can make a big difference.
- People can often feel worried or embarrassed about stammering. You might notice a change in behaviour related to these emotions e.g. they may change their words or use 'tricks' to try and get their words out or choose to talk less.
- Having a stammer should not hold people back. There are a lot of successful people in a range of careers who stammer.
- Therapy is likely to include developing a good understanding of stammering, communication skills and confidence, managing thoughts and feelings around stammering and to help talking feel easier.

Top tips for supporting children who stammer

Being open about stammering: Openness and a relaxed attitude will give the clear message that it is ok to stammer, and it is ok to talk about stammering. If a child comments or appears distressed when stammering it is important to acknowledge this and reassure them, e.g. "I can see the word is stuck; it's ok I'm listening – everyone gets stuck on their words sometimes".

Time to respond: children who stammer benefit from having plenty of time to respond. It is helpful to slow down your pace of talking and pause before responding so that they do not feel rushed. Do not finish their words for them or offer advice such as ‘slow down’, ‘think about what you want to say’ or ‘take a deep breath’ as this may make them feel under pressure or frustrated.

If comfortable for your child, maintain eye contact to show that you are listening and interested in what they are saying.

Dealing with bullying and teasing: Children who stammer can be more at risk of being teased or bullied than other children. Keep an eye out for any unacceptable behaviour and talk to your child about bullying. It can be helpful to **dedicate a key person** for the child, who they can talk to about any worries or concerns.

Increase awareness: help other people in the child’s life understand what stammering is and how they can help.

Flexibility is important: Try to be flexible with oral tasks. For example, exams, reading out loud, responding to the register, answering questions, presentations etc.

Talk to the child about what they feel comfortable participating in, and problem solve together about how tasks could be adapted, to reduce worry and discomfort. E.g. deliver presentations 1:1 or in a smaller group; not having a time limit for oral exams; or taking an earlier turn.

Avoid putting the child on the spot: Allow them to put their hand up to answer questions when they are ready rather than directly asking them questions. Give as much time as they need.

Praise: Praising the child for the things that they do well can help to build their confidence in communicating e.g. you could praise them for their vocabulary, good active listening etc.

Be positive: Describe stammering using neutral language, e.g. “he’s stammered more this week”, rather than using words like ‘worse’ or ‘bad’ as this can suggest to the child that stammering is negative.

If you have tried using these strategies and you are still concerned about the impact of your child’s stammer you can:

- Look on our website for further information and advice:
<https://www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/childrens-centre/your-childs-hospital-journey/therapy-services/slt/slc-advice-sheets/>
- Contact us via our ‘Request for Help’ line – see our website for further details
- You can also access further information from the following websites:
www.stamma.org
www.actionforstammeringchildren.org
[www.michaelpalacentreforstammering.org](http://www.michaelpalencentreforstammering.org)