



## 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 and stuttering mean the same thing.
- 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. Stammering is not caused by a child being nervous or shy.
- Parents do not cause stammering but the way you respond to your child's stammer can make a big difference.
- It's ok to stammer. Having a stammer should not hold your child 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. 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.

**Pause:** Pausing regularly when talking helps to slow your speech down and creates 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.

**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, e.g. "look at the big train" rather than "what is it?"

**Keep your language simple:** Children are more likely to use language within their ability level if simple language is used 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 their stammer.

**Special time:** Have one to one time with your child where there are no distractions and they do not 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 as this will reduce urgency to talk.

**Teasing and bullying:** It is important for any teasing/bullying to be dealt with immediately. It can really knock a child's confidence if they are copied/mimicked when stammering.

**Be open about stammering:** It is ok to talk about stammering. If your child comments or appears distressed when stammering, it's 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".

**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](http://www.stamma.org)  
[www.actionforstammeringchildren.org](http://www.actionforstammeringchildren.org)  
[www.michaelpalincentreforstammering.org](http://www.michaelpalincentreforstammering.org)