

Stammering

Identifying children with fluency difficulties

Early language learning is very demanding! One in five children up to the age of 6 displays some stammer-like behaviour (also known as *dysfluency*) during this period of language learning. This can take several different forms. You may hear your child using one, or all of them.

1. You might hear *hesitations* when they are putting sentences together (e.g. too many “ums” or “errs” while talking).
2. You might hear *repetitions* of initial sounds (e.g. “I-I-look”) or whole words (e.g. “on, on, on”).
3. Some sounds might be held on for longer than normal (e.g. “ffffffish” or “ssssssun”), this is known as *prolongation*.
4. Sometimes sounds or words can get stuck altogether and no sound comes out even though the child is clearly attempting to speak, this is known as *blocking*.

Stammering may include additional features of struggle or tension such as extra body or facial movements, or running out of breath whilst talking.

These features can happen more often when children are excited, tired or upset. Some children do not have any response to their stammer, others find it frustrating and may choose to ‘opt out’ of saying specific words, or talking altogether because for them, talking isn’t comfortable.

Most children who stammer will have language skills and vocabularies in line with what would be expected of their age. It is not always easy to tell if a child is stammering or is just ‘a bit overloaded’ but how to respond, in order for them to be comfortable with their talking, is the same either way.

The Stammering Support Centre runs workshops for parents who want to find out more about stammering and how to support their child, and for teachers regarding supporting children who stammer in school.

For more information please contact stammeringsupportcentre@nhs.net.

Early intervention is important so that everyone who communicates with the child can learn how best to support them to be competent and confident communicators. Speech and language therapists will also take into consideration when or whether any direct fluency strategies might be appropriate for the child.

To refer a child to the Stammering Support Centre, please contact your local speech and language therapist in the first instance.

Further information on stammering can also be accessed from Stamma (formerly the British Stammering Association) at www.stamma.org.

Strategies to support Stammering

Strategies to support children who stammer

- Do not focus on the stammer. Give them **praise and support**, comment on the great words they use, their expression, their communication in general.
- **Avoid** saying things like, “slow down” or “take your time”.
- **Slow down** *your own* rate of talking. This shows them that there is plenty of time and no need for either of you to rush.
- **Give them time** to finish talking, avoid interrupting them or finishing off their words.
- **Be interested** in what they have to say rather than how they are saying it.
- Poor reactions to stammering can **undermine** their confidence. Be a good role model for other children to follow.
- **Listen attentively**, and concentrate on what the child is saying while doing so.
- Maintain normal **eye contact**.
- **Get down to their level**, both physically and by speaking in language appropriate to their age.
- **Encourage** speaking situations that could help make it easier for them to join in, e.g. singing, speaking with actions or in unison with others.
- **Reduce** the number of open questions you ask. If they are having a difficult talking day, offer choices of response that help to reduce pressure on their talking e.g. “would you like this one or that one?”
- **Let them choose what they want to say**, rather than putting them ‘on the spot’ e.g. “We had such a lovely day in the park yesterday, we... and we..., can you remember anything else?” instead of “Tell Mrs G what we did in the park yesterday!”