

Stammering

An Information Sheet for Parents of Young Children

What is Stammering?



Sounds like

- Repetitions: I-I-I can do it
- Prolongations: Iiiiiiii can do it
- Blocking (silent)

Looks like



- Tension
- Looking away
- Tapping feet
- Shaking head



Feels like

- Avoiding words
- Negativity around talking

- ✓ About 5% of children between 2 and 7 experience something like stammering. 1% of the adult population stammer.
- ✓ Stammering includes repetitions of sounds, syllables, whole words and short phrases, stretching out of long sounds and vowels, and not being able to get started on a word or sentence.
- ✓ It is normal for this stammering to come and go. It can tend to be worse when children are tired or unwell or when life is particularly busy.
- ✓ Parents do not cause stammering. The causes are multifactorial and are different for every child who stammers.
- ✓ There are many things parents can do to support a child who stammers.

Top Tips for Supporting Children who Stammer



Slow down the rate of your own speech

This is often more effective than asking a child to “slow down” as they may not know how to.



Reduce the number of questions you ask your child

Asking questions can sometimes put a child under pressure. Try commenting on what your child is doing rather than asking questions e.g. rather than saying “what are you playing with?” you could say “you are playing with the red car.”



Give your child time to talk

Try not to finish what your child is saying. It can be helpful to create times when your child has your undivided attention in a relaxed situation as this can encourage your child’s confidence when communicating.



Focus on ‘what’ your child is saying rather than ‘how’ they are saying it

This shows your child that you are interested in what they have to say. Try to maintain natural eye contact and respond to what they have said as you would if they were speaking fluently.



Be supportive

Do not draw attention to your child’s talking if they are not aware that they are getting stuck. If your child is aware, support him or her as you would with any other problem. Acknowledge the stammer in a matter-of-fact way e.g. “that word sounded a bit tricky” or “everyone gets stuck with talking sometimes.”



Managing Feelings

- The natural thing as a parent is to ask questions and try to fix it but it may be more helpful just being there and being quiet.
- Model your own emotions, give your child the labels for how you are feeling. This sends the message that it is okay to talk about feelings.
- Label your child's emotions. This helps them to understand how they are feeling, which reduces some of the intensity about that emotion by giving it a name.
- Take the language out of it by asking your child to draw how they are feeling.
- Acknowledge and validate your child's feelings e.g. "I know it's frustrating when ..."

Useful Tools and Websites for Parents:



VIDEOS:

'Wait Wait I'm not finished yet' (on Youtube)

- 'My stammering tap': <https://vimeo.com/239094673>
- Stambassador Videos: <https://actionforstammeringchildren.org/get-involved/stambassadors/>



BOOKS:

- 'A Beautiful Oops!' (book for children by Barney Saltzberg)
- 'How to Talk so Kids will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk' (a communication toolkit for parents)



WEBSITES:

- British Stammering Association: www.stamma.org/get-support/parents
- Michael Palin Centre: <https://actionforstammeringchildren.org/support/for-parents/>