



Schools

Supporting

STAMMERING

in the classroom



Stammering is primarily a neurological, not psychological, condition. It is often hereditary – about 60% of people who stammer have another family member who stammers.

The below features will probably vary in their frequency according to the speaking situation.

STAMMERING CAN BE...

Repeating

Repeating parts of words several times "Mu-mu-mumummy"

Stretching

Stretching sounds "I want a sssstory"

Blocking

Getting stuck on the first sound of a word so no sound comes out for a few seconds "...I got a teddy."

Effortful

A child may put extra effort into saying specific sounds or words. You may notice tension around the eyes, lips and jaw. They may hold their breath or take a big breath before speaking, so that their breathing seems uneven

Body Movements

Using body movements to help get a word out – stamps their foot or moves their head or losing eye contact when stuck on a word

Hiding

A child tries to hide their stammer: pretend they've forgotten what they want to say, change a word they have started to say or go unusually quiet.

WHAT IS STAMMERING?

Stammering, also known as stuttering, is common in children. Stammering, affects up to 8%, or about one in every 12 children. Children often start stammering between the ages of 2 and 5. Some children will start stammering after this.

Some children will stop stammering naturally or with the help of speech therapy. Some will continue to stammer as they get older. It's difficult to predict what will happen next. Stammering may come and go, disappearing for weeks or months before reappearing.

Stammering is very individual and each child will have their own behaviours.

As a child gets older they may become more self-conscious about their stammer and develop 'tricks' for getting words out. This could include pushing sounds out with extra force, foot tapping, eye-blinking or moving their head.

Children who stammer might start to feel embarrassed and worried about their stammer and try to hide it. They might start to speak less or change a word they want to say to one that's easier. How you respond to a child will affect how they feel. So, if you're feeling anxious and upset about their stammer, they might start to feel that way as well.

THE SPECIALIST STAMMERING SERVICE, SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPY

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DEVELOPMENTAL NON-FLUENCY

A young child growing up has to learn many things. Speech is very complex. The child must first learn to understand language, then to use words and sentences. When children talk they have to think of the right words to use, know how to make the sounds of the words and how to put the words in the correct order. They must also have enough breath to make their voice work. All these things have to be co-ordinated into smooth speech.

Many children learn to speak easily, although some are quicker in certain areas than others. Many children show some hesitancy or non fluency in their speech whilst they are learning to communicate. This hesitancy can often be seen between the ages of 2 – 7 years.

There is a continuum between developmental non-fluency and stammering. It isn't easy to differentiate between the two.

An important factor in the assessment will be whether there is any evidence of tension or struggle and whether there is any avoidance of speaking, which is a sign that stammering has become established



If children who stammer can be supported to build confidence, self-esteem & resilience, this will be of great advantage to them in education, in seeking employment and in their social lives.

THE ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE FREELY AND EASILY IS VITAL FOR PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING IN SOCIETY TODAY.

Teachers, like the child's family, can play a big part in helping children manage stammering– by working alongside the Speech and Language Therapist they can help create a positive narrative of stammering for the child.

HOW CAN A TEACHER HELP?

CHILDREN WHO ARE STAMMERING ARE DOING THEIR BEST WHILST SPEAKING, THERE SHOULD BE NO EXPECTATION FOR THEM TO MAKE CHANGES. IT IS UP TO US AS ADULTS TO CREATE THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT AND SUPPORT FOR A CHILD TO BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE.

Recognise the child's strengths and build their own self-worth

So stammering (whether it is temporary or permanent) does not have a long term effect on the child's confidence and personality. Offer praise and encouragement.

Consider our own reactions

So much depends on the listener's reaction. If you feel anxious, worried or uncomfortable yourself, this will transfer to the child. It is important to look at your own reactions.

Wait. Give them time

Try to look at and listen to the child when they need to speak to you. maintain 'natural' and relaxed eye-contact.

Observe and Ask

Observe the child throughout the school day (in the classroom, playtime, assembly) When is their communication at it's best? When is it harder? Do they seem aware of stammering? (e.g., do they blush/ look anxious? Are there signs of struggle/ tension? Do they try to hide it, switch words or avoid situations?) It maybe helpful to talk to the child, parent and/ or their Speech Therapist to help you understand how a child is feeling about their talking and what helps.

Try not to exclude the stammering child from speaking activities, but do try to arrange things so he or she can succeed and feel part of things.

Reduce time pressure

Pause for one second before responding to the child.

This will slow things down and give them time for thought

Talk more slowly

You will be showing the child how to speak slowly, and they will gradually learn this by copying you.

Create a calm environment

Use visual timetables, reduce background noise, create safe/ quiet spaces for a child to retreat to. If a child is having a difficult day, try calming activities e.g. reading, craft or singing, that shift the focus away from speech.

Adapt your interaction skills

Use shorter, simpler sentences. Avoid asking too many questions.

Encourage the idea of taking turns

Be clear about taking turns and manage turn-taking. This means the child will know they will be able to have their say.



CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

ANSWERING THE REGISTER

This can be difficult for a stammering child. Waiting to talk aloud can cause an increase in tension, anxiety and embarrassment, which in turn can increase stammering behaviours. .

- Try to put the emphasis on an activity other than speech alone – eg whilst answering, a child could be moving to his or her seat.
- Remember to let the stammering child participate in class activities. Exclusion encourages negative feelings and avoidance.
- Try to minimise occasions when the whole class' attention is on the stammering child.
- Encourage flexible ways of answering so each child can vary what they say.

LEARNING TO READ / READING ALOUD

Some children who stammer enjoy reading and are quite fluent when reading, but others find it a difficult situation and become anxious. Reading aloud in front of the class can be a very frightening situation. The situation can be helped by:

- Letting children read aloud in pairs, as a child who stammers is often fluent when shadow reading.
- Letting the child read on a one-to-one basis or in small groups rather than in front of the whole class and by making sure there is no time pressure.
- Encouraging more reading and speaking on easier days and less on days when stammering is increased.

BULLYING AND TEASING

Sadly, children who stammer are more likely to experience bullying than their fluent peers

If teasing occurs in the class it can be handled in the same way as a child making a mistake in spelling or arithmetic. It is helpful to treat stammering as just another aspect of behaviour, rather than something special, and to deal with it in a fairly casual way. Your own acceptance will help to increase acceptance by the other children.

Instances of bullying should always be dealt with as per your school's policy.

OFFER REASSURANCE

If a child is struggling and/ or becomes distressed, reassure them that you have noticed talking is hard right now, it's ok and you are listening. You can also offer to say the word together with them. Perhaps offer an activity that doesn't involve lots of speech

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY

If you have a child in your school who stammers, check if there is already a Speech and Language Therapist involved. Your SENCo may already have a report on file.

IMPORTANT

If you or parents are at all concerned about a child stammering please fill in a referral form with parent's consent or contact us

Stammering Therapy Information

A child who attends Speech and Language Therapy will have a programme tailored to their needs. Recognising a child's strengths and building solutions forms an important part of therapy.

A child will be seen in clinic, home or at school. Following assessment, support and advice will be given to the family and details sent to school. If ongoing support is required, therapy can include;

Communication Skills

Exploring how we use our whole bodies to communicate. Understanding that you can be a successful communicator and stammer.

Speech – How We Talk

Analysing how we talk, exploring what stammering is and what it looks like for each individual.

What helps?

The family will explore what helps and try out a range of tools that people who stammer have found useful. From stammering modification, building resilience, flexible thinking skills, modifying adult interaction and adapting the environment.

If you have any questions, worries or observations, please contact us.

THE FLUENCY TRUST

helping people who stammer communicate confidently

The Fluency Trust Charity in partnership with SBC run residential courses for young people who stammer aged 10-17 years old. Get in touch for more information.



BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND RESILIENCE

Coping with stammering is often challenging for a young child. The difficulties it presents can undermine confidence. Below are some general ideas for promoting confidence in the classroom.

1. Positively notice the child and the things he or she achieves in the classroom.
2. Find out what he or she is good at or knows a lot about and use that interest and knowledge.
3. Help the child to become an expert, or develop skills in a particular area.
4. Choose the child for special responsibilities.
5. Choose the child to be part of a group that supports or counsels other children.
6. Make use of praise, stickers, certificates and notes home to highlight achievements in behaviour or learning.
7. Encourage contributions to the class, this can be showing a piece of work, it can also involve talking but doesn't have to. A stammering child should always feel their contributions have been successful.
8. Encourage the use of regular 'talking partner' with whom the child can regularly share ideas and talk things out.
9. Opportunities to take part in role in a group – behind a puppet or mask as part of a group composed story or in a drama, can free a child from the constraint of self consciousness.

OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES

- [Swindon Speech and Language Therapy Website](#)
Access our free online Stammering Awareness session for professionals
- [STAMMA](#)– Great information and access to online groups and helpline
- [Education reasonable adjustments](#) for stammering children
- [Wait Wait](#) Action for Stammering Children teacher information video
- [How To Be More Hedgehog by Anne-Marie Conway](#), for reading ages 9-12, tells the story of Lily, who has a stammer and is in the last year of primary school.
- ['The Boy Who Made Everyone Laugh'](#), by Helen Rutter aimed at children aged 8-12, about an 11-year-old boy who stammers and dreams of being a stand-up comedian
- Maddie, a young person who stammers, gives information about stammering and how to support secondary pupils who stammer in school ([12 mins video](#)):
- Maddie, a young person who stammers, gives top tips for supporting primary and secondary pupils who stammer in school ([2 min video](#)):



We'd like to know when things go well, suggestions or concerns
Please discuss these with your Speech & Language Therapist
or contact us

You can also fill in our electronic survey [here](#)

