

Stammering Advice for Primary School Age

What is Stammering?

Stammering (which is also known as Stuttering) is a condition that makes it physically harder to speak. It is defined as moments when the flow of speech is interrupted and words/sounds get stuck, even though the child knows exactly what they want to say.

Everyone stumbles over their words from time to time in every day life and this may present as:

Phrase repetition e.g. *"I want-I want that"* or use of fillers e.g. *"he is playing umm football"*
However, a stammer is when speech is presented in the following ways:

Repetitions of whole words or sounds in words e.g. *"m...m...maybe we can have ice cream?"*

Prolongations where sounds within the word are stretched e.g. *"sssssometimes I like to sing."*

Blocking where the child is ready to say the word but tension prevents it from coming out of their mouth as planned (can be silent or hear some noise) e.g. *".....my name is Bob."*

Some children also show secondary behaviours when they speak such as foot tapping, sharp intake of breath, blinking, clicking, chin tucking and avoiding certain words.



What do we know about Stammering?

Stammering is not uncommon, affecting 8 in 100 children aged 2ys—5yrs. Around 6/8 of those children will not continue to stammer past 7 yrs old (transient stammering) and around 2/8 of those children will have a persistent stammer that stays with them as they grow older. At the moment, there is not enough research to confidently say which children will or will not have a persistent stammer.

We know that stammering occurs in all parts of the world, across all cultures, religions and groups of people. There is no link between stammering and intellectual ability and it has nothing to do with someone's character e.g. being shy or nervous. Many influential people have a stammer (like Joe Biden — President of the United States) and it is not something that should ever get in the way of your child doing what they would like to do and achieving their goals.



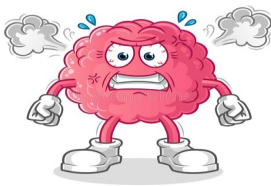
What causes Stammering?

Current research has not reached a complete answer yet on what causes stammering. Brain imaging studies have shown that children who stammer have slight physical differences in the areas of the brain that control the start/stop timing of their speech and that the connections in the brain can be overloaded when speaking. This makes speaking more difficult. This difference within the brain occurs at some point during early childhood development and is linked to genetics (the DNA that the child is born with.) We know that 60% of people who stammer also have a family member who stammers and that boys are also more likely to stammer than girls. There might also be other factors that Scientists and SLT's have not researched yet. Parents do NOT cause stammering or could have done anything to prevent stammering. However, how you respond to the child when they are stammering can make all the difference to how they feel and how easy it is for them to speak.



How does stammering impact my child?

Some children who stammer may develop negative thoughts or feelings about their talking or themselves due to their experiences of stammering, and research shows us that children are aware of their stammer or differences in their talking as early as 3 years old.



For school age children, these negative thoughts can be externalised or represented as a metaphor e.g. "*the brain bully*". The idea is that there is a character who represents self-talk and who is responsible for what they are thinking/feeling when it's not happy thoughts.

Teach your child that they can lessen the "*brain bully's*" impact by:

- ⇒ Talking about the fact that everybody has a brain bully – mummy and daddy do and it is not always helpful.
- ⇒ Saying "*go away brain bully*" bringing the concept into everyday situations and challenging any potential beliefs that the child may have perceived about themselves that aren't true e.g. "*I am not very good at reading out loud,*" "*that sounds a bit like brain bully is in your head, stand up to him and tell him no your reading is very good!*"
- ⇒ Acknowledge when the child ignored the brain bully reinforcing that's a really good thing to do e.g. "*you kept drawing your picture, you ignored the brain bully, well done.*"

What can I do to help?

- ⇒ Have one-on-one time (just five minutes every day) with your child, where they aren't competing for attention with tasks or other family members.
- ⇒ Use short, simple sentences and don't ask too many questions. If you do have to ask a question, make sure you ask one at a time and give plenty of time to answer.
- ⇒ Keep natural eye-contact with your child, listen to what your child is saying, not how they say it and smile to show them they are doing a great job at talking to you.
- ⇒ Make sure you keep your reactions positive (e.g. facial expressions, the words you use) when you hear your child stammer. Try to use neutral language, for example talking about their stammer as "more" or "less", rather than "bad" or "good".
- ⇒ Make sure everyone in the conversation gets a turn and manage teasing/sibling rivalry. Talk to their teacher about being mindful of possible bullying in school.
- ⇒ Be open about stammering with the child, acknowledge when speaking is hard and reassure them it's ok to find something difficult. Ask your child how you can help as children are experts in their own stammer. It is much better to be open and ask about their stammer or how they want you to help them.
- ⇒ Encourage good sleep routines and reduce the busyness/pace of family life where possible.
- ⇒ Build confidence with specific praise about values rather than ability e.g. "I liked how you wanted to help me with that."
- ⇒ Don't interrupt the child by saying slow down or take a breath, this will make them stammer more. Model to them by speaking with an unhurried pace with lots of pauses — they are likely to copy you and this will help slow down their speech.
- ⇒ Don't respond to them straight away — show them that having at least 5 seconds of thinking time is helpful.

How can I find out more about Stammering?

The following websites have support and advice for Parents and children who stammer:

- ⇒ Stamma.org
- ⇒ Michaelpalincentreforstammering.org
- ⇒ Actionforstammeringchildren.org
- ⇒ Coventrychildrenslt.co.uk

Go to onevoicecoventry.co.uk and

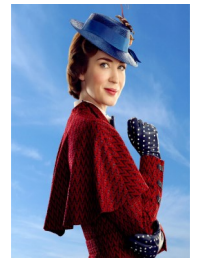
coventry.gov.uk (send local offer for Coventry) to see what support is available locally.

There is also a Facebook group 'UK Peer Support Group For Parents Of Children Who Stammer' for parents to support each other and share experiences.

Please also search 'MyStammeringTap' on Youtube - a video from a child who stammers.

How can I help myself?

- ⇒ Remember it's okay to stammer and a lot of famous people stammer too. What you say and what you do is far more important than the fact that your words get stuck.
- ⇒ Slow down! You might want to speak quickly to get the stammer over with but our brains need time to think about what's next. Thinking and slowing down gives our brains more time to put together the words we want to say.
- ⇒ Sometimes it might feel like pushing out the word helps, but it actually makes the word more tense and stuck. Instead try to relax.
- ⇒ Sometimes you might choose a different word. This might seem like a good idea but it means that you don't quite say what you want to say. Practise saying what you want to say, even if you do stammer. The more you practise the easier this will be!
- ⇒ Try training your brain to notice things that are going well. Every time you think something negative about yourself, finish with 'but' and think of something you are happy about. Noticing the good stuff and congratulating yourself, especially when you do something that is out of your comfort zone, can help grow your confidence.
- ⇒ Practice being kinder to yourself. Notice when you are feeling down. Think about how you would talk to your friends if they



had a problem and do the same to yourself.

- ⇒ Letting people know that you have a stammer and talking about it might help you feel better about it.
- ⇒ You are the expert in your stammer! Tell people how they can help you e.g. making sure they wait for you to finish what you are saying, not interrupting you etc.
- ⇒ Make sure you wait for your turn to speak and don't interrupt others. Interrupting someone might make you stammer more as you rush to speak.
- ⇒ Practise your techniques you learn in therapy, practise will make it easier to use them naturally. You can think of these as strategies in your tool box. It is up to you to use them in conversation if you find they help you to make talking easier.
- ⇒ Teach others about stammering — if your friends know what stammering is, they are less likely to be unkind and more likely to stand up for you and encourage you to be confident.

