



Children's Speech and Language Therapy Stammering Advice for Teachers



Please share this advice with all staff who work with the child or young person.

What is stammering?

- Stammering and stuttering mean the same thing.
- Stammering is caused by tiny differences in the brain. It is not caused by parenting, nervousness, lack of confidence, or a lack of intelligence.
- It can be **variable** – some days someone will stammer more and some days they will stammer less; it can vary from situation to situation and from person to person. This is completely normal.
- **It is how some people talk.**

People who stammer **might feel**:

- Stuck and unable to move forward in their talking
- A loss of control

To others, **stammering can sound like**:

- Repeating words e.g. "Can can can can I have one?"
- Repeating initial sounds e.g. "m-m-m-mummy I want a biscuit"
- Repeating parts of words e.g. "mum-mum-mum-mummy I want a biscuit"
- Stretching sounds (Prolongations) e.g. "aaaapple" or "sssssausage"
- Blocking - the sounds get stuck/ no sound comes out
- People who stammer may also do other things such as: holding their breath, gasping or running out of breath, showing tension in their face or body, or shutting their eyes.

Stammering can also be about how the person feels inside. Some people who stammer tell us they may feel embarrassed, upset, ashamed, alone, or frustrated. Everyone's experience of stammering is different. Some people feel that stammering contributes to who they are and feel proud to stammer.

Stammering can be hidden; Children and young people who stammer may also try to hide their stammering from others, usually because of the negative reactions they receive from others.

For many children, their stammer will stop naturally, for others, they will continue to stammer. For that reason, we need our children to feel **confident in their communication** whether they continue to stammer or not and this is always the focus of our therapy.



Children and young people need to grow up in a communication environment that lets them know that **it is okay to stammer, and that you are accepting and comfortable with it**. This provides a model for the class to follow!

Make small changes for ALL students, not just the child who stammers.

You can help by:



- **Listening** to what the child says, without interrupting, finishing off words or giving advice, **just wait**. Give time and patience and let them say their own words.

Though it is often well-intentioned, interrupting a child to tell them to 'slow down' or 'take a deep breath' can:

- Make them feel that you care more about whether or not they stammer, rather than what they have to say.
- Gives a subtle message that you don't like hearing stammering.
- Create pressure to speak more quickly to finish what they have to say before they are interrupted.
- Cause frustration.
- Change how they react to their stammer (physically and emotionally).

- Keeping **natural eye contact** and show relaxed body language and facial expressions.
- Giving **praise** for all the things they do well, including their talking (regardless of whether they are stammering or not). Be genuine and specific. For example, "You're really good at explaining things", "You're so fun to talk to".
- Telling them that it is **okay to stammer** and that their words are important and valuable. For example, "Your words are important", "Your ideas are worth sharing", "You speak beautifully", "Stammering is beautiful". (These ideas have come from adults who stammer).



- **Talking openly** to children about their stammer can be helpful. However, your speech therapist can give you more advice about how and when to have this conversation. It is helpful to acknowledge what the child is experiencing and validate their feelings. Remind them that you are interested in hearing what they have to say.
- Being mindful of the **language** used **to talk about stammering**. Saying "Your speech is really bad today" or praising a child for stammering less can give a subtle message that stammering is wrong and may make a child feel that they should speak less or try to hide their stammer, which we know can cause long term harm. It can help to talk about more/less stammering rather than it being 'better' or 'worse'.
- **Building resilience** – let the child be independent and do things for themselves; this includes talking for themselves. Let them make their own mistakes and solve their own problems; this will let them know that they can do things for themselves and believe in themselves.
- Having the **same expectations** as you do for students who don't stammer.

- **Giving them your full attention when they are talking to you.** If you're busy, help them wait rather than giving half your attention. Use a visual countdown timer if this is helpful.
- **Encouraging turn talking within the class and group discussions.** Children who stammer need more time to take a turn in conversations. Create opportunities by using pauses, encouraging other children to take turns, and waiting. It is harder to talk when being interrupted or having to rush to interject into a conversation. Joining in a group discussion can be very hard for people who stammer due to the rapid timing and crossfire of speech. People who stammer need more time to talk.
(Be understanding that some peers may find it difficult to take turns too). Explain the rules:
 - Listen to the person who is talking
 - Look at the speaker
 - Wait until the other person has finished
 - Everyone should have a turn
 - Don't carry on too long
- **Giving time and space** for the child to stammer by slowing down your pace of conversation, rather than telling the child to slow down. Remember to use pauses to give lots of opportunities for them to respond. A more relaxed pace of conversation will help to reduce pressure to talk quickly and show that you are listening.
- **Noticing if the child is saying less and/or not joining in** and letting their family and Speech Therapist know.
- **Be alert for teasing and bullying.** Refer to school policies and take immediate action. It's very important for children to see that mocking stammering in any way is taken seriously and is not tolerated.

As well as the above, for older children and young people:

- **Speak to them about how best you can help in class and find out what they are comfortable with.** Each subject teacher could do this as it may differ from lesson to lesson, or this could be coordinated and disseminated by the SENCO. Regular check-ins are good!



Supporting children who stammer to join in

We want to gently encourage children to join in without being under pressure to do so. Ask the Speech and Language Therapist for more advice if needed.

Children who stammer have told us that there are certain situations in school which can be particularly difficult for them:

Situation	What you can do to help
Answering the register	It can be helpful to allow students to respond to the register in alternative ways. This means being flexible about how the students participate in the register, for example: having a choice of response (i.e. "here", "present", or "yes") rather than a single set response, permitting a nod of the head or a wave, or using a self check-in system. These options should be available to all students in the class, not just the student who stammers.
Taking turns in a group	See turn-taking advice on previous page
Feeling completely stuck	Talk to them about what they would like you to do if they get completely stuck.
Reading aloud	It can be helpful to ask the child what their preference is and then gradually (at their pace) work towards reading in front of the class - sometimes it may be reading to a peer, an adult, and then a small group or reading at the same time as someone else; remember some students will be happy to read to the class!
Dealing with teasing/bullying	See teasing advice on previous page
Asking or answering questions Children who stammer might not put their hand up, even if they know the answer to a question, for fear of stammering in front of the class. They might also find it difficult to ask for help if they haven't understood.	You can help by: - Letting children put their hands up to answer questions rather than cold calling or using a random name generator. - If the child puts their hand up, trying not to let them wait too long for their turn, as anxiety can increase whilst waiting. - Wandering around the class to check if everyone is following OK. The child who stammers may be more likely to let you know one-to-one if they haven't understood something.
Giving presentations	Allow extra time, foster tolerance, comment on the content not the stammer, model waiting and listening.
Dinner queues Can be hard if you're worrying	You can help by making sure lunchtime supervisors are trained in stammering and know to wait for the person to say

about stammering in front of a lot of people or holding people up.

what they want without interrupting. Some schools have provided lunch passes to skip the queue for children whose fear and anticipation of stammering increases as they wait.

Children who stammer also tell us that they have never seen stammering posters in their school! You can help by displaying the following posters:

- Action for Stammering Children's Posters featuring children from Barnsley: <https://actionforstammeringchildren.org/resource/about-my-stammer-school-posters/>
- Posters by Abed Ahmed ('stammer teacher'): <https://www.trythisteaching.com/2021/03/stammer-awareness/>

And remember to celebrate International Stammering Awareness Day on 22nd October every year!

- **Want to learn more about stammering? We recommend the following resources for school staff:**
- **Book a place on our free stammering training:** (open camera and hold over this square to get link) 
- **Watch our YouTube videos about stammering: (Barnsley Speech and Language Therapy)** (open camera and hold over this square to get link) 
- **Visit Stamma Website:** www.stamma.org
- There are resources and information about reasonable adjustments and how to support both primary and secondary school aged children
- **Visit the Michael Palin Centre website:** www.michaelpalincentreforstammering.org
- **Visit Action for Stammering Children website:** www.actionforstammeringchildren.org
- **'About Stammering' e-learning:** This interactive, accessible course is available FREE by registering on: www.bdcftlearning.co.uk
- **Search 'My stammering tap' on YouTube** (analogy describing the experience of stammering)

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The children and young people of Barnsley want school staff to know:

Be aware that it doesn't change who we are as students or how intelligent we are.

Be patient, don't finish off our words.

We may need a little more support with communication than others.

It doesn't change who you [are]... [It's not] representative of your character.

Accept that sometimes we can't answer questions because the words won't come out, it's not that we're being lazy, it's just too much of a distressing situation.

Don't judge someone for stuttering, they can't help it as people with a stammer are neurologically different to people who don't stutter. Saying spit it out isn't going to change anything.

Support anyone who stutters as it's a hard task to deal with on a daily basis.

Ask the person/talk to the person [about how you can best help]

Be patient and don't try to finish off their sentences as it is an underwhelming feeling when you can't finish what you wanted to ideally say.

Be supportive of your child's stammer and follow the guidance of the speech therapist.

Reward the child if they've done something well... regardless of whether they stammered or not; let them know if they've accomplished something e.g. talking in class or asking a question.

With **all of us** in mind.

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