

Telephone: 01226 644331

Email: barnsley.speechtherapy@swyt.nhs.uk

Website: www.barnsleyspeechtherapy.co.uk



South West
Yorkshire Partnership
NHS Foundation Trust



Children's Speech and Language Therapy Advice for families of children who stammer



We know that when your child starts to stammer, it may be a time of worry. You may want the stammer to reduce or go away completely or may feel that you have done something to cause the stammer. Lots of parents feel that way. 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.

There are many successful people who stammer. People who stammer can thrive in their educations, careers, and relationships. For more information, go to:
www.actionforstammeringchildren.org/stambassadors

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.

Let your child know that it is **okay to stammer and that you are accepting and comfortable with it.** You can do this 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.

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With **all of us** in mind.

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 your **natural level of eye contact** and showing relaxed body language and facial expressions.



- Giving **praise** for all the things they do well, including their talking (regardless of whether they're stammering or not). Keep it 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).
- Being mindful of the **language used to talk about stammering**. The way we talk to children becomes their inner voice. 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'.
- **Talking openly** to your child about their stammer is helpful, especially if they are showing frustration or getting upset about it. It's fine to call it stammering. Your speech therapist can give you more advice about how 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.
- Some children are not aware or concerned about their stammer. Simply hearing matter-of-fact conversations about stammering, acknowledging stammering in an accepting way, and discussing the differences in how people talk is helpful. Talking about stammering with your child in a neutral or positive way will not be harmful.

We know that some parents can worry that they haven't been doing the 'right thing' in the past. That's okay! Remember - parents do not cause stammering.

The way *you* talk and interact with your child can help them speak more comfortably. You can support them by:

- **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.

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- **Giving your child 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.
- **Giving time and space** for your child to stammer by slowing down your pace of conversation, rather than telling your child to slow down. Remember to use pauses to give lots of opportunities for your child to respond. A more relaxed pace of conversation will help to reduce pressure to talk quickly and show that you are listening.
- **Turn taking:** Children who stammer need more time to take a turn in conversations. Create opportunities by using pauses, encouraging other family members to take turns, and waiting. It is harder to talk when being interrupted or having to rush to interject into a conversation. (Be understanding that some family members may find it difficult to take turns too).
- **Spending unhurried time** with the child each day, where you're just playing together and there's no pressure to achieve anything. This is called 'Special Time' and may be something you do as part of your child's therapy. You can practice some of the ideas above, or just enjoy your time together.



More information and advice can be found at:

- **Stamma** www.stamma.org which contains useful information, advice, and links to other sites, e.g. parent support groups.
- **Action for Stammering Children** actionforstammeringchildren.org
- The **Michael Palin Centre for Stammering Children** www.michaelpalincentreforstammering.org

All these organisations are also available on Facebook, Instagram, and X.

Parent Support Groups

- See www.stamma.org
- Facebook: UK Peer Support Group For Parents of Children Who Stammer
- Facebook Voice Unearthed – Supporting Children who Stutter

Watch our YouTube videos to see children and young people who stammer talk about what helps:

What is Stammering?

https://youtu.be/JFgN9_GbmTE



Advice to support young people who Stammer

<https://youtu.be/c9atwMjTeJo>



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What our parents say:

Focus on your child and not the stammer. Don't show worry or frustration. Love and accept him/her just the way they are

Gently encourage your child to actively take part in talking situations

Listen, learn, don't be afraid to seek advice

I used to stop what I was doing and sometimes come to eye level when she was really stuck. Also, I think sleep routines help loads

Reward your child if they've done something well.... regardless of whether they stammered or not; let them know if they've accomplished something

I reflect on the language I used at times, thinking I was helping when actually being negative

Your journey as a family may take time and can be tough

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And from young people who stammer:

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

Your
talking is
always
fine

Remember your
stammer isn't a
bad thing or a
negative thing and
needn't affect
anything you want
to do in your life

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....

It doesn't matter
how we talk, it
matters *what* we
say

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