

Remember

If you are at all concerned about a child's speech please fill in a referral form with parent's consent.

www.swindonspeechandlanguagetherapy.wordpress.com

Access our information leaflet for parents here

<https://swindonspeechandlanguagetherapy.wordpress.com/advice-leaflets/>

Access our advice leaflets on how adults can adapt their communication to support communication

<https://swindonspeechandlanguagetherapy.wordpress.com/advice-leaflets/>

The British Stammering Association have a website, specifically for information and advice, for supporting children who stammer.

www.stamma.org

Access our, free of charge, Stammering Awareness sessions
Details of how to book here

<https://www.swindon.gov.uk/schoolsonline/>

We're listening – tell us what you think

We welcome your comments about our services. 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

<https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/SpeechTherapyfeedback/>



SWINDON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Early Stammering

Information for Early Years

Information about stammering and helping to support a child in your setting.



The Specialist Stammering Service
Speech & Language Therapy
The Salt Way Centre
Pearl Road
Swindon
SN5 5TD

Tel: 01793 466790

What is Stammering?

Stammering which begins in early childhood is known as developmental stammering. In young children stammering is not uncommon. Stammering, or stuttering, affects up to 8%, or about one in every 12 children, normally between the ages of two and five. In most children this will be shortlived.

Stammering is primarily a neurological, not psychological, condition. What is clear is that parents do not cause stammering. The way you respond to a child's stammer can make a real difference.

Stammering is when a child:

- **repeats** parts of words several times ("Mu-mu-mumu-mummy.")
- **stretches sounds** ("I want a ssstory.")
- **gets stuck** on the first sound of a word so no sound comes out for a few seconds ("...I got a teddy.")
- puts **extra effort** into saying specific sounds or words. You may notice tension around the eyes, lips and jaw
- holds their breath or takes a big breath before speaking, so that their **breathing seems uneven**
- uses **body movements** to help get a word out - stamps their foot or moves their head
- loses **eye-contact** when stuck on a word
- 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.

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

Other Things That Will Help

Re-actions to stammering

- Try and remain calm and relaxed about the stammering. In this way the child will not feel that their talking is 'bad' or 'wrong'.
- Do not correct or criticise the child's talking. Avoid asking the child to stop, slow down, start again or take a breath.
- Don't feel that you need to say the word for the child, instead **repeat back** any stammered words after the child speaks. In this way, you are showing the child a smooth way of talking.

e.g. Child says "I sssee a ca ca cat"

Adult says "Oh yes, you see a cat. A lovely black cat"

- Acknowledge if the child gets really stuck and is distressed. In the same way as if the child fell over, comfort and reassure them:
e.g. "It's ok, you're still learning with your talking. I'm listening".
- You may want to offer help "shall we say the word together" and praise them when they finish. "Well done, you said it".
- You may want to do an activity together that doesn't involve lots of speech.

Deal with difficult questions

Children in the setting may ask questions e.g. "Why does Ben talk like that?". Respond honestly and carefully, e.g. "Ben sometimes gets his words stuck. He knows what he wants to say so we can help him by giving him a little bit more time."

Discuss with Parents and Speech Therapist

If the child has been referred to the Speech and Language Therapist, it would be useful to share your observations of the child in your setting. You may want to contact the speech and language therapist who can offer advice about how to support the child in your setting.

Common Questions That Are Asked

Is the child putting it on?

The answer is probably not. Stammering makes communication more difficult and why would a child want to make life more difficult for themselves!

Is the child copying someone who stammers?

Children do copy each other, but it is unlikely that they would do this for any length of time. Stammering is not “catching”. If more than one person in a family stammers it is probably due to genetic factors.

Did someone cause the child to stammer?

Research has shown that people cannot cause a child to stammer. However, the way people react to the child who stammers can make a difference to fluency.

I’m concerned that a child may be stammering – what should I do?

If you are concerned that a child in your setting may be stammering then discuss this with their parents. It is a good idea to refer to the speech and language therapy service for advice.



Demands and Abilities

A useful way to think about stammering is to imagine an old fashioned set of scales. These scales represent a child's talking. On one side we have the child's ability to talk smoothly. On the other side are demands on the child. These demands may be placed on the child by the people they talk to, the environment they are communicating in or by the child themselves.



Abilities

Demands

To think of it simply, tip the scales one way and the child can talk smoothly, overload in the opposite direction and stammering will occur.

Common Demands

- **Time pressure** – there may be a sense of “hurriedness”. The child feels he has little time and tries to speak quickly.
- **Rate of others** – the child has to work harder to process the information and think of how to respond.
- **Turn taking** – the child rushes in all the time or can't have their say.
- **Level of language** - the language levels of adults or the child himself can impact on fluency. Using language that is too complicated means the child has to work harder to understand and think of how to respond. This can make it more difficult to speak smoothly.
- **Re-actions to stammering** – the way people react to stammering affect it.

What Can You Do To Help?

If stammering occurs we can support the child by thinking hard about what demands are being placed on them. Observe the child in your setting and see if you can notice what increases or decreases stammering. Try and make a list of demands and start thinking about how to reduce them. By reducing the demands we can try and re-balance the scales.

Reducing Demands in Your Setting

Time Pressure

- Try and be calm and less 'hurried' during activities so that the child does not feel rushed.
- Show the child that you are listening to them. Maintain 'normal' and relaxed eye-contact – Don't look away but try not to stare either.
- Use pausing to create the impression that there is no hurry to speak. Pause for one second to model 'thinking time'. This can give the child time and space to organise his thoughts into words and sentences.

Rate of Speech

- Slow your speech slightly when talking to the child and pause. In this way you are showing the child how to speak more slowly and gradually he will learn this by copying you.

Turn Taking

- Be clear about taking turns in the setting and manage turn-taking. This means that the child who stammers knows that they will be able to have their say.

Language Levels

- Keep your own language simple – use short simple sentences and reduce the number of questions you use. The child will find it easier to process and respond to this simpler language and will not be overstretching himself to produce language which is too sophisticated for his ability.

Normal Non-Fluency

Learning to talk, like learning to walk, is never a completely smooth and trouble-free process. Many children stumble over words as they learn to construct sentences. A natural period of non-fluency often occurs between the ages of 2 – 5 years. During this period, children may repeat words or phrases and use some interjections (um's, eh's) as they sort out what it is they're trying to say. Children usually grow out of this without any help.

It may be difficult to tell the difference between normal non-fluency and early stammering. If you are at all concerned about a child's speech you should discuss with parents and consider a referral to Speech and Language Therapy.

