

Remember

If you are at all concerned about a child's speech fluency please fill in a referral form with parent's consent. You can also download our information leaflet to give to parents www.swindonspeechandlanguagetherapy.wordpress.com

Access our information leaflet for parents here <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/>

Stammering

Information for Schools

Information about stammering and supporting children who stammer in school



The Specialist Stammering Service
Speech & Language Therapy Services
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Foreword

Stammering affects 8% of children. If children can be helped to manage their stammer and build confidence & self-esteem, 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 specialist speech and language therapists who will assess the child and plan therapy.

It is hoped that this booklet will give new knowledge to the teacher faced with a pupil who stammers.

Some of the ideas and suggestions in this booklet are taken from Renee Bymes' book 'Lets Talk about Stammering'



Resources and Useful websites

- **The Fluency Trust Charity**- supporting young people who stammer and running residential courses for children aged 10-17 years old
www.thefluencytrust.org.uk
- **The British Stammering Association** - Information and advice for stammering and access to their online training resource for teachers
www.stamma.org
- **Action for stammering children**- Teacher information and access to the 'Wait, Wait' DVD
<https://www.whittington.nhs.uk>
- **Stammering- A Practical Guide for Teachers and other Professionals** Rustin, Cook et al



Stammering Therapy Information

A child who attends Speech and Language Therapy will have a programme tailored to their needs. It should be stressed that none of these techniques should be tried without liaison with a Speech and Language Therapist. Recognising a child's strengths and building solutions forms an important part of therapy.

Communication Skills

Supporting a child's understanding of communication including improvement of their general social and conversational skills. This can involve review of body posture, facial expression, eye contact, gesture, listening skills and the use of greetings, questions and ways of attracting attention, or asking for help in a conversation.

Speech – How We Talk

The child is encouraged to analyse how we produce speech – from using the brain to think of what to say, through breathing control, to voice and articulation of sounds. Sometimes a little more time is needed to sort out this process.

Fluency Techniques

There are a range of techniques that may be used. These will be selected by the therapist to suit the individual child's needs. If a child is learning fluency control techniques his/her therapist will let you know about these. It may be appropriate to help the child to learn how to stammer in an easy and relaxed way. It is the tension in stammering that causes most difficulties.

Relaxation

Games and activities can be used to explore the difference between being calm and relaxed and being tense or excited. Children can come to realise that, by calming themselves, they can expect an improvement in their speech.

Breathing

Some children who stammer have difficulty using a smooth deep breathing pattern. They sometimes take shallow breaths, tensing their shoulders, and this means that they hold air in when they speak or run out of air in mid-sentence. A child may be taught diaphragmatic natural breathing – learning to expand the rib cage when filling up with air and relaxing the stomach as the air is used for speech.

What Is Stammering And How Does It Start?

Stammering is speech which is hesitant, stumbling, tense or jerky to the extent that it causes anxiety to the speaker and/or listener. Stammering isn't caused by nerves. It is mainly a neurological and often hereditary condition.

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.

Most 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 – 5 years.

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



Normal Non Fluency Vs Stammering

As a guide, here are some of the characteristics of normal non-fluency and stammering.

Speech Characteristics

Normal Non-Fluency	Stammering
Whole-word or phrase repetitions	Sound or part word repetitions
Pausing or use of interjections	Prolongation of sounds
One or less word dysfluencies per 100 words	Blocking
Periods of fluency interspersed with periods of non-fluency	Three or more word dysfluencies per 100 words
No evidence of tension, struggle or avoidance.	May be aware of non-fluency
Happily communicates and is unaware of non-fluency.	May show some tension/struggle behaviour
	May change words or give up a speech attempt.

A child who stammers may:-

- Have another speech or language delay or disorder
- Show poor communication skills.
- Have a history of stammering in the family.
- Show anxiety about the stammering.

If the child shows any of the stammering features the family should be seen by a Speech and Language Therapist, preferably one who specialises in treating people who stammer.

The therapist will assess the severity of the stammering (e.g. repetitions, prolongations, holding on to sounds and blockages). 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

Involving a Speech and Language Therapist

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.
- If you have any concerns, or would like more details of the therapy being used, you should contact the therapist involved.
- If you are at all concerned about a child's speech fluency and they have not seen a Speech and Language Therapist please fill in a referral form with parent's consent.

www.swindonspeechandlanguagetherapy.wordpress.com

What happens next?

- A young child who is experiencing a period of non-fluency will be seen in the clinic or at home by the therapist and the advice will be directed towards the parents – as it has been shown that the way the non-fluency is handled at home greatly influences its resolution.
- Information and advice will be discussed, and details will often be sent to the school. It may be necessary for a therapist to visit the school, and if you have any questions, worries or observations, please contact the therapist and a visit can be arranged.
- Children in their early years at school may still be experiencing a phase of normal non-fluency and, if they are not worried by their stammering, much of the therapy will once again be centred on the family.
- Older children or children who are clearly aware of their stammering and may be showing signs of tension or struggle will probably have a course of therapy with a Speech and Language Therapist – either individually or in a small group with other children. Parents are always involved in the therapy so that ideas and techniques can be used at home.

Building Confidence

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 know 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.
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.



The Facts

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.

Many 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.

Examples of Stammering Include:

- Repetition of single sounds or whole words, eg "G-g-go away!" or "When, when, when is playtime?"
- Stretching sounds in a word, eg "I like that ssstory."
- Blocking of sounds, when the child's mouth appears ready to speak but no sound comes out for several seconds, eg "----I got a book."
- Stopping speaking half-way through a sentence.
- Signs of facial tension, eg around the mouth.

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.

How Can A Teacher Help?

The most important need of a stammering child is to recognise his or her own self-worth – so that the stammer (whether it is temporary or permanent) does not have a long term effect on the child's confidence and personality.

When beginning to look at the way a stammering child may feel in the school environment, we must first consider how we feel ourselves. So much depends on the listener's reaction. If you feel anxious or worried yourself, this will transfer to the child. It is important to look at your own reactions. It often helps considerably if you become aware of how the child feels about his or her speech, and it will be useful to talk about this to the parents and the Speech and Language Therapist. How the child feels when he stammers can be gleaned from observations – e.g., does he blush or look anxious? Does he struggle and seem tense when stammering? Or does he try to avoid speaking? If a child shows all these signs, he is probably aware that he has some difficulty. It is not necessary to label the difficulty as stammering, but it might be helpful to talk to him about his speech and his feelings towards speech, so that you can give encouragement and support.

Some Useful Suggestions

- 1) Spend the first week observing the child in your classroom and, if possible, at dinner time and play times. Observe what factors affect their fluency and when they stammer e.g., excitement, rushing, anxiety, talking in a group, being interrupted, complicated tasks etc.
- 2) Spend the second week noticing how you and other people react to the child's stammering
- 3) Do not ask the child to slow down, start again or take a deep breath etc. This can focus too much attention on their speech.
- 4) Try to speak slowly and use pausing when talking to the child so that they do not feel hurried.
- 5) If the child is having a difficult day, take the focus away from speech.
- 6) Accept stammering periods as just one of those things. This attitude will transmit to other children.
- 7) 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.

Challenging Situations

Answering the register

This can be difficult for a stammering child. Waiting to talk aloud can cause an increase in tension and a child may begin to anticipate problems.

- 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's 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 fluent days and less on days when stammering is increased.

Teasing

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.