

# STAMMERS



## STAMMERING IN SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

**Stammering, also known as stuttering, is common in children. About one in every 12 children will stammer, most frequently between the ages of two and five. Some children will start stammering after the age of five.**

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 your 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 your 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.

It's hard not to worry but be positive about your child's stammering if you can. There are lots of successful people whose stammering hasn't held them back. Try to talk with your child about their speech whenever they want to. Openness and a relaxed attitude will give the clear message that they are so much more than their stammer.

## CAUSES

**Parents don't cause stammering so don't blame yourself.** Research indicates that stammering is a neurological condition related to the part of the brain where speech develops. Stammering also often runs in families - around 60% of people who stammer have a relative who stammers or used to stammer.

## TIPS

Share these with your child's teacher and other key staff:

- Try not to finish the word your child is struggling on.
- Be patient, give your child time to say what they want. Focus on what they say rather than how they say it.
- Slow down your rate of talking to reduce any time pressure your child may feel.
- Don't tell your child to slow down or take a deep breath. While well-meant, the former is impossible and the latter can become part of the struggle to talk.
- Do fun things with your child so that the focus is not always on their talking.
- Praise your child for the things they are doing well.
- Don't ask lots of questions and give them time to reply.
- Try and keep a consistent routine as much as you can when it comes to bedtime, meals and discipline. This can help reduce tiredness and irritability.
- Treat everyone in the family the same, including your child.

## RING US ON 0808 802 0002

**Weekdays 10am-noon; 6pm-8pm. Free. Confidential. Anonymous.** Call us to talk through any concerns you have about your child and stammering. We're here to listen and provide support. We can help you find details of your local NHS service and talk through how best to support your child. If your child is aged 14 or upwards, they can call us to practise speech techniques, have a chat and gain confidence in using the phone.

# STAMMA



## TEASING & BULLYING

Anyone who looks or sounds different can become the target of bullying or teasing. Encourage your child to talk about what's happening at school. If they report any bullying or teasing, go and talk to their teacher and be part of the plan to stop it.

## GETTING HELP

Speech and language therapy for children who stammer is available free of charge on the NHS, at your local clinic. You can normally make the referral yourself or you can ask your doctor or your child's school to do this for you. For details of your local clinic, search online by typing in 'Children's speech and language therapy + your location'. Or give our helpline a ring free on 0808 802 0002 and we can help you. You may have to wait several weeks before being seen, since most therapy departments have waiting lists. The visit will be relaxed and informal.

## THERAPY

The speech and language therapist will first want to find out as much as they can about your child and their communication needs.

At the initial assessment the therapist will ask you questions about your child's speech and language, their health and development.

The therapist will also spend time with your child, listening to their speech and looking at their communication skills in general.

There will be time for you to discuss any concerns you have and what you can do to help. Your child might be put on review and seen again in a few months' time or might be offered some therapy.

There could be a wait between the first appointment and therapy. The type of therapy will depend on a number of factors and could be either individual therapy or in a group with other children of the same age.

Therapy is likely to include teaching your child strategies for easier talking, developing their communication skills and overall confidence, and giving them tools to manage their thoughts and feelings around stammering.

You have an important role in your child's therapy as they will need your support to put into practice the skills they're learning.

## GROUP THERAPY

Below are UK courses for young people. Some may need local Clinical Commissioning Group funding.

### City University, London

Five-day intensive courses for those aged 8-18 during school holidays.  
Tel: 020 7040 0150.

### The Fluency Trust

Residential courses in Devon for ages 10-17. Courses combine intensive speech therapy with outdoor pursuits.  
Tel: 01793 466790.

### The Michael Palin Centre for Stammering Children

Intensive group therapy for 10-14 and 15-18 year olds during school holidays in London.  
Tel: 020 3316 8100.

### The Starfish Project

Residential three-day courses in East Sussex for ages 11+.  
Tel: 01825 767268.

### The Talking Out Residential

Five-day residential courses in Yorkshire and the North West for ages 12-16, combining speech therapy and outdoor activities. Tel: 07763719272.

## CONNECT

### British Stammering Association Facebook Support Group

Moderated by BSA, this closed group provides a space for people to share experiences, ask for advice and talk openly about stammering. Anything you post there will only be seen by other group members. Parents often find it helpful to connect with adults who stammer.

There is also the Facebook Group called the UK Network for Parents of Children who Stammer

Keep up-to-date with our campaigns, get information and support. Join us or just subscribe. It's free.

[Stamma.org/join](https://stamma.org/join)

## STAMMA.ORG

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