

# STAMMIA



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. The impact of having a stammer can be profound, impacting a child's self-confidence, social skills and long-term career prospects.

## CAUSES

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.

Much of this leaflet is about reinforcing what you already know and practise in school.

## STAMMERING IN CHILDREN

The negative thoughts which accompany a stammer can be all-encompassing, and this negativity, often fed by other people's responses can take on iceberg-like proportions in the child's mind, with the fear of stammering dominating their lives. On top of this they face the confusion of why they stammer.

Your acceptance of their stammer can give them confidence, and how you treat their stammer will set an example for all the class to follow.

Stammering is very individual, examples include:

- Repetition of sounds or words, eg "g-g-go away!" or "When, when, when is playtime?"
- Stretching sounds, 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 mid-sentence.
- Signs of facial tension, eg around the mouth.

Many children will stop stammering naturally or with the help of speech therapy, and some will continue to stammer, it's unpredictable. Stammering is also variable. Sometimes a child will stammer a lot and the next day very little.

Situations where a child may stammer more include saying their name, explaining complex ideas, using new vocabulary and when under time pressure. Praise the child when speaking in these circumstances.

Less stressful situations can help build a child's confidence, such as:

- Speaking in unison
- Reciting familiar lists eg, days of the week
- Singing
- Speaking in a strong rhythm eg, poems
- Feeling relaxed and unpressured
- Speaking in smaller groups.

## TAKE ACTION

If you think a pupil in your class has a stammer, talk to the parents first. Take the lead from them before speaking to the child privately to find out how you can help. Talk to other staff as they may know about a child's stammer. If a speech and language therapist is involved, they will have sent a report to the school – ask if you can see any recommendations.

If the child is not having speech therapy, ask the child's parents if they think it would be a good idea. You can help them make the referral via your SENCo, their GP or directly. Find details of their local NHS service by typing 'children speech and language therapy + location' into a search engine.

Speech therapy can be helpful whatever the child's age. Therapy is likely to be a long-term process and isn't always about getting the child to be more fluent – often it's about building up their confidence and maximising their enthusiasm to talk in all situations, despite their stammer. Speech therapy often includes working with parents and teachers.

## A HIDDEN STAMMER

Some children will go to huge lengths to hide their stammer out of embarrassment. This is known as covert or interiorised stammering. They might appear withdrawn in class, isolated from their peers. Talk to the parents and follow the 'how to help' suggestions here. Perhaps have a session with the class talking about disabilities, covering covert stammering and how hard this can be, and the 'social model' perspective on disabilities.

## TEASING

Children who stammer can be more at risk of being teased or bullied than other children. Keep an eye out for any unacceptable behaviour and follow your school's anti-bullying policy.

# HOW TO HELP

- Keep natural eye-contact.
- Allow each child to finish what they're saying.
- Stay focused on the message.
- Teach wait time.
- Build the child's confidence, praise them for what they do well.
- Encourage the child who stammers to contribute in class or in small groups.
- Encourage the whole class to develop listening skills.
- Give them a help buddy, a fellow pupil who can support them in and out of the classroom.
- Don't tell them to 'take a deep breath' or 'take their time'. Although well-meant, it rarely helps and can lead to the child feeling frustrated.
- Avoid putting the child on the spot by directly asking them questions. Allow them to answer questions when they want to and give them as much time as they need.
- Don't exclude a child from speaking in class as this can undermine their confidence.
- Even if you feel anxious when the child is stammering, try not to show it. Remain calm, kind and approachable.
- Acknowledge the stammering in a matter-of-fact way. This helps the child feel it's OK to stammer. You might say something like, "That was a hard word to say."
- Make it clear you're there for them and that they can talk to you whenever they like. Take their lead and encourage them to tell you how to support them.

## SHARE

Ensure everyone (teaching, admin and catering staff) who comes into contact with the pupil knows how to help:

- Share this leaflet and put it up in the staffroom.
- Encourage the child to create a card with key information about their stammer, to share with others.
- Encourage the child to give a talk, with you or their speech therapist, to the class about their stammer and what others can do to help.

Ring us to talk through any concerns you may have about a pupil who stammers. We're here to listen and support.

# OUR HELPLINE 0808 802 0002

**Weekdays 10am-noon; 6pm-8pm**  
**Free. Confidential. Anonymous.**

### Other sources of support:

**Stamma website** - take a look at our resources for teachers who stammer: [stamma.org/resources/teachers](http://stamma.org/resources/teachers)

**Michael Palin Centre for Stammering:** Has a useful section for teachers, including a great video introduced by Sir Michael Palin himself.

**Stammering Tap** A short animation made by children and adults who stammer and speech and language therapists to explain what stammering is all about.

Keep up to date with our campaigns, get information and support. Join us or just subscribe. It's free.  
[Stamma.org/join](http://Stamma.org/join)

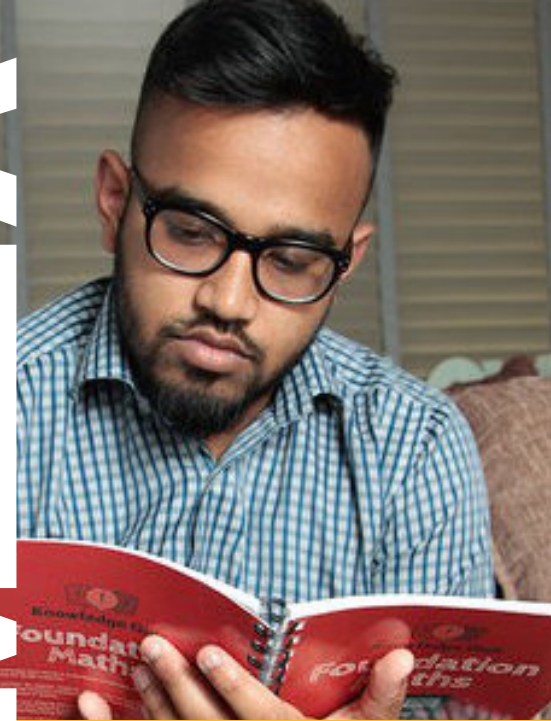
# STAMMA.ORG

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# STAMMA



**Stammering affects up to 8% of children, which means 1 to 2 children in every class of 30 may have a stammer.**

You may hear a child repeat, prolong and/or block on sounds and words. **Or you may hear nothing** as some children swap words and avoid talking because of the shame, frustration and fear of being 'found out'.

As a teacher or teaching assistant you can have a transformative role in supporting these children.