

Stammering Information – Advice for Parents

The Older School Aged Child

By now the child who stammers may have been stammering for some time. Some children may stammer with obvious physical tension and some may have mild, infrequent non-fluencies such as repetitions and sound prolongations.

To speak fluently children need to: know lots of words, know how to put words together (grammar); think quickly of the “right word” or correct sentence to say what they mean; listen and understand what others say; learn which sounds we use in our language and how they are put together to form words. They also need to coordinate the movements for breathing and speaking. These skills are affected by how the child feels as well as by the demands placed on him. When the child feels: happy, confident, listened to, sure of the content etc..., then it is easier to speak well. When the child feels: upset, tired, unwell, over-excited, unimportant etc..., then speaking can be difficult. Depending on these factors breaks in fluency can be expected.



You are not the cause of your child's stammering but you are the best people to help their talking get easier.

It can be difficult to offer support to others when we are worried ourselves. Try to put yourself in your child's shoes to think of ways to help. If your child is worried about speaking they may try not to stammer. The harder he tries, the worse the stammering is likely to get.

It is important for you as well as for your child not to go on worrying. Try to find help soon. Contact your local Speech and Language Therapy Department and seek information from other resources, e.g websites, reading material.

You will want to help your child when you see them struggle to speak. This is understandable. Perhaps you don't find it easy to listen to your child stammering and you would like it to stop. If your child feels that his stammering is not acceptable then they will try hard to stop it or hide it and this will result in increased tension and then more stammering.

You can help your child by letting them know that it is ok to stammer. Try not to give advice such as “stop”, “take a deep breath” as this can often be unhelpful and may only help for a short while. Listen to what they are saying and not how they are saying it. If you remain relaxed and calm whilst they are speaking then this will help their talking become easier.

Sometimes your child may not want help with their talking. Then it is no use trying to offer further help. He will only get more tense which will make his talking more difficult. What he needs most are parents who will listen to him and accept his speech regardless of whether he speaks fluently or stammers.



Sometimes it is helpful to discuss how your child is feeling about their speech but they do not have the courage to discuss it with you. You may want to start the conversation on occasions but make sure that your child realises it is okay if they do not want to talk about it. Your child may feel angry or sad because of his speech problem. It is important that they know they can talk to someone who will listen and understand.

Be encouraging. Stammering can often affect the child's confidence and they fail to notice the things they are good at. Noticing these efforts and praising them will help to boost your child's self-esteem.

If they are having difficulties in school with speaking tasks, talk to the class teacher and your child about how these tasks could be made easier. It is important that your child is encouraged to participate without feeling under too much pressure. Avoiding speaking situations altogether are not always the best solution.

Teasing

One of the things that make stammering so difficult is that it occurs within social settings. There is no way of keeping it to yourself. Many people who stammer feel ashamed of their speech and can be very sensitive to teasing.

If your child has been affected by teasing it is important to have a discussion with them about why children tease and to problem solve ways to respond and how to react. If this occurs in school then it is best to involve the class teacher also.

Tips for Talking with the child who stammers....

1. Listen to what they are saying rather than how they are saying it.
2. Respond by listening and making eye contact. Your reactions should help your child become more relaxed.
3. Use a slower more relaxed rate of speaking to encourage an unhurried pace of conversation.
4. Try not to make remarks like "slow down", "take a deep breath", "relax"- this often draws attention to the child that they are not speaking properly and often these comments aren't helpful.
5. Have a discussion with your child about how you can or cannot help. He may or may not want you to comment.
6. Have a discussion with your child and show your support and encouragement by telling them that their speech does not bother you and that it is ok to get stuck sometimes



For more information visit

STAMMA

The British Stammering Association
stamma.org

STAMMA Helpline 0808 802 0002
(Weekdays 10am-noon, 6-8pm)



The Stuttering Foundation of America
www.stutteringhelp.org



Action for Stammering Children
actionforstammeringchildren.org