

Stammering Information – Advice for Teachers

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.



A particular concern for teachers is the child's reactions to his stammering and the reactions of others in the classroom. How should the child be expected to participate in class? The answer to this question depends on the individual child. At one end of the scale is the child who may be quite unconcerned and happy to participate like any other child; at the other end there is the child who will avoid speaking at all costs. Most are somewhere in between. If the child is attending Speech & Language Therapy then the therapist will let you know about particular strategies. It is important for the parents and teachers involved to have a discussion with the child to find ways to encourage them to participate without putting too much pressure on them. Sometimes participation requirements become part of the child's IEP/ASP.

Answering Questions

- When asking questions try not to keep the child who stammers waiting too long for their turn since this might increase anxiety and also stammering
- Children who stammer may need more time to express their ideas. Assure the whole class 1) they will have as much time as they need to answer questions, and 2) has time and to think through their answers, not just to answer quickly. A slower pace will be encouraged if the teacher also slows down their rate of speech.
- Children often drop eye contact when stammering and it is helpful if adults don't look away but give the same eye contact as they would if speaking to a child who is fluent.
- Finishing off sentences is usually unhelpful as it reduces self-confidence and increases frustration, especially if the person chooses words different from those intended by the stammering child.
- Where daily attendance or registration is causing problems, you can discuss with the children alternative ways of responding, e.g. putting a hand up, clapping etc.

Reading Aloud

Many children who stammer are able to handle oral reading tasks in the classroom satisfactorily, particularly if they are encouraged to practice at home. There will be some, however, who will stammer more severely when reading aloud. Here are some suggestions which may help these children:

- It can help if the stammering child is allowed to read in unison with another child as this will assist fluency. Let the whole class read in pairs sometimes so that the child who stammers doesn't feel different. Gradually he may become more confident and able to manage reading aloud on his own.
- A classroom policy that encourages a relaxed reading pace may help the child who stammers as well as slow or hesitant readers.
- It may be necessary to work gradually towards reading in front of the class. Reading alone to the teacher or other adults can be followed by reading in small groups. When the child feels ready, reading to the class can be attempted.



Individual Attention

- A child who stammers may find it very difficult to approach teachers either with concerns or to be sociable. If teachers can see the child on their own now and again this could help to ease communication.
- A child may focus on problems with speaking and be less aware of any positive achievements. This can lead to low self-esteem. Increasing use of praise can encourage self-esteem as well as get the focus off of the stammer.
- One of the most important things is that the child does not start to believe that stammering is 'bad'. Sensitive discussion about the child's difficulties and strengths can help reduce the need to hide the stammering and this can lead to better fluency. The harder children try to prevent stammering the more severe the stammer can become. The less bothered they are about speaking the more fluent they are likely to be. Trying to avoid the stammer and taking some risks with speaking is a delicate balance and the child should be involved in deciding when to play safe and when to be more adventurous.





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.

It is best to deal with teasing about stammering not as an individual problem but rather include it in discussions and activities about teasing and bullying in general, as in personal and social education (PSE) lessons. Social skills programmes help to encourage tolerance and friendship.

If the child has obviously been upset by teasing, talk with him or her on a one-to-one. Help the child to understand why others tease and problem solve ideas for how to respond.

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

1. Speak with the pupil in an unhurried way, pausing frequently.
2. Allow the child to finish what they are saying. Try not to finish off their sentences or talk for him/her.
3. Listen to *what* they are saying rather than how they are saying it.
4. Respond by listening and making eye contact. Your reactions should help the pupil feel more at ease.
5. Encourage turn taking in the classroom- children who stammer will find it easier to talk when there are few interruptions.
6. Have a discussion with the pupil who stammers to find out what they find difficult and how you could make speaking tasks easier. Where possible encourage the pupil to participate in speaking situations they feel comfortable with. Avoiding speaking tasks completely may not be the most helpful solution.
7. Don't make stammering something to be ashamed of. Talk about stammering just like any other matter.

Please share this information with all who communicate with your child.



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