

Advice sheet: Stammering

The ideas that follow are necessarily general and some of them will make sense and be easy to try out, while others will feel less useful.

Don't try to do them all at once - select one or two at a time to begin with. Nothing works immediately, so gradually build up a few that seem to be helpful and discard the ones that are not. We all want to help the child who is struggling to speak.

A few thoughts and suggestions to begin with:

- It may be unhelpful to tell your child to slow down. Adults find it hard enough to change their rate of talking and we shouldn't ask a child to do something that we can't do! Your child may be able to go more slowly for a moment or two, but it is unlikely that it will last - then you will both end up feeling frustrated
- While your child will probably be more fluent if you ask them to say the problem word again, this is unlikely to help him/her the next time he or she tries to say the same word
- Telling your child to think first before he or she speaks has a short-term effect. It can also add to the frustration

Instead:

- Try to arrange some time during the day - perhaps five minutes - when your child can have your undivided attention in a calm and relaxed atmosphere
- Listen carefully to your child, concentrating on what he or she is saying, not how he or she is saying it. Try not to look away from your child when he or she is having difficulty talking
- Slow down your own rate of talking, as this helps to create a calm and relaxed atmosphere for speaking
- Reduce the number of questions you ask and make sure you give your child time to answer one before asking another
- Allow time for the child to finish what he or she has to say, rather than finishing it for them
- Pay attention to the number of times the child who stammers is being interrupted, or interrupts others. Explain to all the family the importance of taking turns when talking
- Praise your child for the things he or she does well (not related to talking) as this can help build confidence
- Treat your stammering child in exactly the same way as you would any other child regarding their behaviour - discipline needs to be appropriate and consistent
- Stammering and a fast pace of life don't always go well together. Some routine and structure in daily life can be helpful
- As with all children, enough sleep and a healthy diet are important to mental and physical development

If your child is aware of the stammer - and it feels right, ask them what they think would be helpful when they are having difficulty with their talking. Being open about it is much more natural than trying to pretend it isn't happening.

For children learning more than one language:

The general advice for supporting children who stammer, who are learning more than one language, is very similar to the suggestions outlined above. A few additional ideas are considered here.

It is helpful to:

- Continue using two languages at home
- Continue to model language to your child so he/she can hear the correct model. If your child switches between two languages, don't worry. This is a typical stage for bilingual children to go through
- Be consistent in your choice of words to name objects in a particular sentence. If you are using a word in one sentence try not to refer to that word in the additional language in the same sentence
- The focus should be on helping your child feel successful in communicating with you. Continue speaking your chosen language/s to your child even if he or she speaks back to you in a different language. If he/she responds, the message has been understood
- Use short phrases with lots of gesture and facial expression, as well as expression in your voice. This will help the child understand the meaning behind the words
- Encourage your child's attempts to communicate in either language, giving lots of praise
- Use nursery rhymes and stories from any culture/language
- If you or your child is concerned about stammering, ask your GP to refer you to a speech and language therapist
- For further information, visit the following websites:

www.londonsigbilingualism.co.uk

www.speechtherapy.co.uk

www.bilingualism.co.uk

www.stammering.org