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Aneurin Bevan
University Health Board

Information for Parents and Carers of children aged 7 years and under who stammer

Speech and Language Therapy

This leaflet explains some of the ways parents, carers and education staff can help children who stammer. *Stammering*, *stuttering* and *dysfluency* all mean the same thing.

Please share this information leaflet with significant adults involved in the child's life e.g. grandparents, class teacher.

Talking and fluency

When young children learn to talk, they often stop, pause, start again and stumble over words. Between the ages of two and five years many children repeat words and phrases and hesitate with 'um's and 'er's, when they are sorting out what to say next. Many children become more fluent as they get older while others continue to stammer.

If you are at all concerned, Speech and Language Therapy involvement is appropriate.

What is stammering?

You may notice your child:

- is repeating parts of words several times (mu, mu, mu, mummy)
- is stretching out sounds in a word ('I want a ssssstory')
- cannot seem to get started and no sound comes out for several seconds (... I got a teddy')
- has extra movements when talking e.g. blinking more
- changes a word they were going to say to a different word to avoid stammering

These behaviours vary from child to child and stammering can come and go for days, weeks or months at a time.

What causes stammering?

It is not known exactly why a child stammers; it is likely that a combination of factors is involved. There is no evidence that parents cause stammering. It is about four times more common in boys than in girls. Stammering often runs in families and occurs worldwide in all cultures and social groups.

What affects stammering?

Your child's stammer may change according to:

- the situation e.g., if it is noisy or quiet, rushed or relaxed, at home or at school/nursery
- who they are talking to e.g. friends, parents, teachers, strangers, pets, toys, self
- what your child wants to say e.g. if it is complicated or easy, if the words are new or familiar
- how your child is feeling e.g. unwell, tired, anxious, relaxed, excited, confident

What can parents and carers do to help?

Set aside a few minutes at a regular time each day when you can give your full attention to your child in a calm, relaxed atmosphere. Follow your child's lead by playing with what they want to play with and talking about what they want to talk about. During this time, build their confidence by praising them for what they are good at (e.g. 'you are good at puzzles' or 'you waited for me... that was patient of you'). Make things relaxed rather than rushed. Once you have established these special times with your child, choose one of the following points and try it out during this time. It may take time, but these suggestions can help your child to stammer less.

- Slowing down your own speech when you talk to your child will make it easier for them to follow what you are saying and help them feel less rushed. This is likely to be more helpful than telling them to slow down, start again or take a deep breath.
- It may help to pause for one second before you answer your child or ask them a question. This slower, less hurried way of speaking gives your child time before answering.

- Show your child you are interested in what they say, not how they say it. Look at them when they talk, so they know you are listening and do not need to rush their speech. If you are busy doing something and cannot stop, tell your child that, although you are busy, you are still listening or explain why you cannot listen, but give them your full attention later.
- Use shorter, simpler sentences. Avoid asking too many questions.

What will the speech and language therapist need to know?

The speech and language therapist will ask you for information so they can understand how your child communicates. They will ask you questions about your child's general health and development and about their speech e.g. when does your child stammer more and when do they stammer less?

The therapist will also want to speak to your child and listen to them talking. They may look at other aspects of your child's communication development e.g. the way they talk and play with others, their understanding and use of language, how they say their words and what their speech sounds like when they stammer.

What will happen next?

There are several options to be considered; you and the therapist will discuss and agree what is best for you and your child.



Sometimes it might not be the right time for you (or your child) to commit to Speech and Language Therapy for your own personal reasons. Please be honest about this and be aware that if you do not attend appointments without letting us know you will be discharged.

Helpful websites:

- STAMMA, the largest UK charity and membership organisation representing people who stammer [https://stamma.org/get- help/parents](https://stamma.org/get-help/parents)
- Stammering in pre-school children factsheet available in English and Welsh from <https://www.gov.wales/talk-with-me>

For further information please contact:

Speech and Language Therapy Service on 01633 431615.

8.00am to 4.00pm Monday to Friday or visit our website

[https://abuhb.nhs.wales/hospitals/a-z-hospital-services/speech-and- language-therapy/](https://abuhb.nhs.wales/hospitals/a-z-hospital-services/speech-and-language-therapy/)



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