



Speech & language
therapy

Fluency

What is stammering speech?

You may notice your child

- Is putting an extra effort into saying his words
- Has tense and jerky speech
- Cannot seem to get started, no sound comes out for several seconds (“ ... I got a teddy”)
- Is stretching sounds in a word (“ I want a sstory”)
- Is repeating parts of words several times (“mu-mu-mu-mu-mummy”)
- Stops what he is saying half way through his sentence.

These examples vary from child to child - you may hear some or all of these when your child talks.

What is known about 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.

How is fluency affected?

Whatever the age of your child, there are things he is able to do easily and some things which he finds difficult. Your child's fluency may change according to

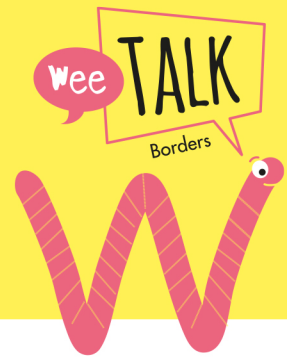
- The situation (e.g.: if it is noisy or quiet, rushed or relaxed, at home or in the nursery)
- Whether your child is talking to friends, parents or strangers
- What he wants to say (e.g.: if it is complicated or easy, if the words are new or familiar)
- How he is feeling (unwell, tired, anxious, excited or confident)



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General strategies

- **Show your child that you are interested in what he says, not how he says it.** Try to maintain natural eye-contact when he is having difficulty talking. Don't finish his sentences - this can be frustrating for him.
- **Be supportive.** Respond to a speech difficulty in the same way that you would with any other difficulties that arise as they develop their skills, such as when they trip over or spill things. If you feel it's appropriate, acknowledge the difficulty in a matter-of-fact way, so that he doesn't feel criticised. Avoid labelling the difficulty as stammering. You could use expressions like "bumpy speech" or "getting stuck", or ask him for his own words or descriptions.
- **If you speak quickly, slow down your own rate of speech when you talk to your child.** Telling him to slow down, start again or to take a deep breath is unhelpful. Pausing for a second before you answer or ask a question can also help him to feel less rushed.
- **Be encouraging if your child gets upset about his speech, just as you would if he was upset about any other difficulty.** You might say something like "Don't worry, talking can be tricky sometimes when you're still learning."
- **Observe your child's speaking patterns but try to resist seeing it as a 'problem'.** Stammering is not caused by parents, but your anxiety can be passed on to your child, who may feel he is doing something wrong. In fact, he is just struggling a bit at the moment, and the stage may well pass.
- **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.** You could follow his lead in playing or talking about something he likes. Try to talk about the things you are doing together right now, not about things that happened in the past or are planned for the future.
- **Reduce the number of questions you ask.** Always give your child plenty of time to answer one question before asking another. This way, he is less likely to feel under pressure. Keep your sentences short and simple and instead of asking questions, simply comment on what your child has said, thereby letting him know you are listening.
- **Take turns to talk so that everyone in the family can speak without being interrupted.** This will reduce the amount that your child is interrupted, or that he interrupts others.
- **Respond to your child's behaviour in the same way that you would with a child who does not stammer.** As with any other child, discipline needs to be appropriate and consistent.
- **Try to avoid a hectic and rushed lifestyle.** Stammering can increase when your child is tired. Children who stammer respond well to a routine and structured environment at home and at nursery or playgroup. It is also helpful to establish regular sleep patterns and a regular healthy diet.



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Useful resources

British Stammering Association Website : www.stammering.org

This offers an Expert Parent Website a parents' resource which is live, with information to guide you as your child progresses through the education system.

British Stammering Association Helpline:

0044 20 8880 6590

The BSA Helpline is a confidential service offering callers the opportunity to ask, talk about and explore any issues of concern about stammering.

The helpline is run by a team of staff and volunteers who fully appreciate how difficult it can be to talk and stammer on the telephone.

Email BSA at info@stammering.org

For more information on the Speech and Language Therapy Service (including how to request support from us) please see: <http://www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk/slt>
[Check out our Wee Talk Borders Facebook page or you can call us on 01896 826710](#)