



## Talking about Stammering

*Stammering, stuttering and non-fluency* are terms used interchangeably to describe the same thing. There are many kinds of non-fluency, so you may notice some or all of the following speech behaviours:

- ✓ Your child is putting extra effort into speaking – this may show in the form of intense concentration or slower speech
- ✓ Speech may sound strained, forced or jerky
- ✓ Your child may use “fillers” e.g. “um”, “er”, “like”, “you know”
- ✓ Your child may play for extra time to think and plan his response by using “what?” “uh?” Sometimes this can be mistaken for not understanding or not knowing the answer
- ✓ Phrases, whole words or parts of words get repeated several times e.g. “So-so-so-somebody took my book”
- ✓ Words seem to get stuck in the throat and *no* sounds comes out for a few seconds e.g. “.....my name is Sam”
- ✓ Some sounds may be prolonged or stretched out e.g. “ssssay that again”
- ✓ Your child may stop half way through his sentence and start again

## What do we know about stammering

Unfortunately we don't know why a child stammers but it is likely that a combination of factors is involved – ranging from genetics, social-emotional stresses, the influence of language & speech development and a degree of learned behaviour.

Stammering is found in all cultures and languages – even in deaf communities who use sign language! Stammering can come and go in ‘cycles’ – this means that your child's speech may be smooth and fluent for days or even months, but then may start to become difficult again. Factors known to influence the chance of recovery include:

- ✓ A less severe stammer
- ✓ The length of time that has passed since the onset of stammering
- ✓ Some change in the way the person speaks - particularly in older children and adults (e.g. slowing down their speech rate)
- ✓ Gender

Stammering is about four times more common in boys than in girls, although girls may be more likely to recover their fluency during childhood. About 50-80% of children who stammer will recover with or without professional treatment – mostly *before* reaching puberty.

## So what affects my child's fluency?

Just like anyone else, your child will be better at some skills than other – as such their fluency may change according to

- ✓ Situational pressures e.g. if it is noisy or rushed, or if he is having to compete with sibling for a turn to talk
- ✓ How he is feeling at the time e.g. sick, tired, nervous, excited or confident
- ✓ Who your child is talking to e.g. their pet dog, friends, parents or strangers



- ✓ The language he needs to use to express himself e.g. if it is complicated or easy, if the words he uses are new or familiar

## How can I help my child?

A speech and language therapist can help children and families. But, it is important to seek advice as soon as possible should you have concerns about your child's speech. Here are some ways you and your family members can help him:

1. **Don't blame yourself** - there is no evidence that parents cause stammering – this was one prehistoric theory that has long been disproved and discredited.
2. **Special time** - give your child your full attention for five minutes about three times a week. This is often called 'special time' and is important because here he is not competing to talk over friends and siblings. The situation is also relaxed rather than rushed.
3. **Take turns** - when it is his turn to speak, give him time to finish what he is saying without interrupting or finishing his sentence for him.
4. **Follow his lead** - play what he wants to play and talk about what he wants to talk about. Not only is this style of interaction excellent for developing meaningful conversational language skills, but it also lets your child feel important, listened to *and* in control.
5. **Praise him** - for things he does well e.g. "You explained that so well – I understand exactly what to do!" or "You are really good at drawing people".  
Once you have had some special times with your child, choose one of the other points mentioned and try it out during this time.
6. **Avoid** - telling your child to slow down, take a deep breath or start again. This usually doesn't work and can be frustrating.
7. **Model the speech behaviour that you do want** - and he is likely to *mirror* this behaviour
  - **Speak a bit more slowly** - it sets a relaxed tone for your conversation, helps him feel less rushed and he is very likely to slow down himself. It will also then be easier for him to follow the conversation and take his turn when opportunities arise!
  - **Pause** - for 1 second before you respond to him or ask a question.
  - **Use good eye contact** – this shows that you are interested and indeed listening, so there is no need to rush
8. **Be honest** - if you are busy and cannot give him your full attention now, tell him this but agree a time later when you will be all his
9. **Language** – during non-fluent times use the same kind of sentences that your child does - keep them short and simple.

Although your child's speech is not likely to change overnight, making these suggestions a regular part of your family routines can help your child to talk more easily.

## What help is available?

A study published August 2005 in the British Medical Journal showed that preschool children (i.e. children under 7 years of age) who stammer will have a higher recovery rate and significantly less stammering if they are treated with the Lidcombe Programme, compared to those who receive none, or minimal therapy.



As a randomised controlled trial, it studied two similar groups of children, one who received Lidcombe treatment, the other receiving little or no treatment. After nine months of treatment, children receiving Lidcombe had reduced their stammering by 77%, compared to 43% who did not receive it. The BSA has campaigned for more therapy provision for young children because stammering is treated most effectively before a child starts school.

The significance of this study is that it has produced very clear evidence that therapy, in this case the Lidcombe Programme in the preschool years, can significantly reduce stammering. With therapy services needing to show clear evidence to justify their work, this study provides important data to show that treating stammering in young children is much more effective than relying on natural recovery.

## Where can I get help?

Speak to our team of speech and language therapists who are Lidcombe trained on **020 8246 6722** or call the British Stammering Association (BSA) who have a confidential telephone **helpline** for parents wanting for advice and information (0845 603 2001 - calls charged at local rate)