



What can I do if I think my child is stammering!

Learning any complex new skill takes time and hardly ever develops without some hiccups along the way. Talking is no different - children often stop, hesitate, start again and fumble over words when they are learning to talk. Between the ages of two - five years, it is normal for children to repeat words and phrases, to hesitate using 'um's and 'er's as time fillers, as if he is planning what to say next. In fact about 5 in every 100 children may stammer for a while when learning to talk.

Research shows that the most children outgrow this phase of non-fluency over time. However, the British Stammering Association recommends that you refer your child to a Speech and Language Therapist as soon as possible. The [BSA](#) or [RCSLT](#) can put you in touch with local professionals. The therapist can provide you with information, carry out a full assessment, discuss advice with you and help you to monitor your child's progress.

In the meantime, to support your child through this period, we also advise you to follow the guidelines provided here - small changes can make a surprising difference.

Remain positive - try to avoid seeing the non-fluency as a 'problem'. The fact is that your child may well pass through this phase of communication development without any long-term implications.

Be supportive. Treat fluency difficulties in the same way as you would treat any other difficulty s/he may have e.g. in mastering toilet training. If you feel it is appropriate, acknowledge the difficulty in a matter of fact way e.g. "that was a difficult word to say" without making your child feeling self-conscious.

Say something reassuring if your child is distressed or embarrassed about talking, just as you would if s/he were distressed or embarrassed about anything else, e.g. you might comment "I can hear that those words are a bit hard for you right now – that's ok. Talking can be like that when you are learning."

Resist labelling the non-fluency as a "stammer" at this stage. This can be unhelpful - instead the British Stammering Association advise using expressions like 'making words jump', 'bumpy speech', 'getting stuck'. Ask your child to describe what is happening in their own words.

Speak to someone about your concerns. Call the BSA Helpline and talk over your feelings with their Information and Support Officer. The more you can deal with your own worries the less chance there will be of your child feeling anxious about what may be a very natural stage of development.

Read our other article "Talking about stammering" for more ideas on how to support your child.

BSA Helpline: 0845 603 2001 (all calls charged at local rate)

www.stammering.org