

the early years toolkit

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Stammering

Learning to talk, like learning to walk, is a skill which develops gradually. Many young children will often stop, pause, start again and stumble over words when they are learning to talk.

Between the ages of two and five, it is typical for a child to repeat words and phrases and to hesitate with 'ums' and 'ers' when sorting out what to say next.

What you may see

About five in every hundred children stammer for a time when they are learning to talk.

- Your child may repeat parts of words several times e.g. "mu-mu-mu-mummy"
- They may stretch out parts of words e.g. "sssstory"
- Some cannot seem to get started and no sound comes out for a period of time e.g. ".....I got a ball".

Many children will find it easier to talk as they get older but others will be at risk of developing a persistent stammer.

Should you seek advice?

If there are concerns about a child's fluency, a referral to CYPIT is advised as soon as possible. Early intervention by a Speech and Language Therapist can help young children with fluency difficulties.

What can you do to help?

- Show you are interested in what the child says, not how they say it. Look at the child so they know you are listening.
- Give the child time to finish what they are saying.
- Slow down your own rate of talking. This will help the child feel less rushed and is more helpful than telling a child to slow down start again or take a deep breath.
- Use language that the child can easily understand.
- Give the child periods of individual time in a calm, relaxed atmosphere

without competition and interruptions from other children.

- Reduce the number of direct questions you ask the child.
- Pause for a second before you respond to the child's question. This less hurried way of talking reduces the pressure on the child to reply quickly.
- Accept non-verbal responses from the child (such as a nod of the head).
- If the child is experiencing great difficulty with the non-fluency or stammering, reduce any demands of spoken language.

Where can you get further information?

- The British Stammering Association (BSA) www.stammering.org
- The Michael Palin Centre for Stammering Children www.stammering-centre.org
- The Communication Trust www.talkingpoint.org.uk