

# the school years toolkit

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## Stammering

You have been directed to this Advice Sheet for strategies to help children who stammer.

Please use the information within this Advice Sheet but also immediately contact CYPIT for further guidance.

There are a variety of terms which are used to describe stammering, all of which mean the same thing. These are:

- Stuttering
- Fluency difficulties
- Stammering
- Dysfluency/dysfluent speech.

### Definition

Stammering is a communication difficulty, not just a specific speech problem. Stammering involves a combination of overt behaviours and hidden feelings.

The exact cause of stammering is not yet known. However, it is likely that there are a number of possible factors which cause a child to stammer. The stammer may be episodic in nature and have periods when it is absent. It is not always possible to predict when the stammer will come and go.

### What you may hear and see

- Repetitions of sounds, syllables words or phrases.
- Silent pauses which may be gaps or blocks.
- Prolonging of speech sounds eg "caaaaaar".
- Visible physical struggles in order to speak such as blinking, mouth contortions, facial tics, grimacing, body tension, foot stamping, fist clenching, shoulder raising etc.
- Unusual breathing patterns, struggling for breath, sounding "out of breath".
- Avoidance of some words. As a result, some children may avoid and be unable to use some specific curriculum vocabulary.
- Avoidance of some situations. For example, answering questions or certain activities.
- The child may be anxious, may be left out of social groups or may have difficulty making friends.

## Section 5 **advice** sheets

- The child may be subjected to teasing, even bullying.
- The child may appear to be “quiet”, “shy”, “aloof”, “not having much to say”. This may reflect their hidden feelings e.g. guilt, shame, fear, panic, poor self-image/esteem, anxiety etc.

### Strategies and advice

How you can help:

#### For the older child

- Have a confidential discussion with the child as to what they would find helpful in the school setting.
- Have an agreement with the child about strategies which could be used with other members of staff.
- When asking questions to the class, try not to keep the child who stammers waiting too long for their turn as the wait may increase their anxiety and lead to more stammering.
- Slowing down your own rate of talking can signal to all children that there is no need to hurry. A child who stammers may need longer to express their ideas.
- Reading in unison with another child may assist their fluency.
- The child's stammer may make it difficult for him/her to give an accurate idea of his/her knowledge and understanding, so children who stammer may need individual time to express any difficulties and show their true abilities.
- Try to maintain natural eye contact during a conversation, even though the child who stammers may turn away and lose eye contact as they stammer.
- Alternative means of responding in class situations, that is use of non-verbal responses, may be helpful for the child who stammers, eg use of white boards or Post It for written responses.
- Finishing off sentences is usually unhelpful as it can reduce self-confidence and increase frustration.

#### For the younger child

- Show you are interested in what the child is saying, not how they say it. Look at the child so they know you are listening.
- Slow down your own rate of talking.
- Use language that the child can easily understand.
- Give the child periods of individual time without competition and interruptions from other children.
- Reduce the number of direct questions you ask the child.
- Remain calm so the child doesn't feel under pressure to reply quickly.
- Accept non-verbal responses from the child (eg nod of the head).
- If the child is experiencing great difficulty with stammering, reduce any demands for spoken language.
- Talk about their stammering if the child wants to.

## Suggested Resources

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The British Stammering Association (BSA), 15 Old Ford Rd, London, E2 9PJ.

Telephone: 0208 983 1003.

Fax: 0208 983 3591.

[www.stammering.org](http://www.stammering.org)

The Michael Palin Centre for Stammering Children.

[www.stammeringcentre.org](http://www.stammeringcentre.org)

[www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk)