

Strategies to Support Stammering

Tips for parents to support younger children who stammer

The ideas that follow can be beneficial in supporting fluency in young children. Don't try them all at once – select one or two at a time to begin with. Nothing works immediately so gradually build up a few strategies that seem to be helpful:

- Try to arrange some time during the day – perhaps five minutes – when you can give your undivided attention in a calm and relaxed atmosphere.
- Listen carefully, concentrating on what your child is saying, not how s/he is saying it. Try not to look away when s/he is having difficulty talking.
- Slow down your own rate of talking, as this helps to create a calm and relaxed atmosphere for speaking.
- Reduce the number of questions you ask and make sure you give time to answer one before asking another.
- Allow time for the child to finish what s/he has to say, rather than finishing it for them.
- Pay attention to the number of times that they are being interrupted, or interrupt others. Explain to all the importance of taking turns when talking.
- Give specific praise for the things s/he does well (not necessarily related to talking) as this can help build confidence.
- Treat the child who stammers in exactly the same way as you would any other child regarding their behaviour – discipline needs to be consistent.
- Stammering and a fast pace of life don't always go well together. Some routine and structure in daily life can be helpful.
- As with all children and young people, enough sleep and a healthy diet are important for mental and physical development.
- If the child is aware of their stammer – and it feels right – ask them what they think would be helpful when they are having difficulty with their talking. Being open about it is much more natural than trying to pretend it isn't happening.

Tips for older children who stammer

Here are some ideas from children that have attended the Michael Palin Centre for Stammering Children; a specialist centre based in London:

- Try to take your time rather than rushing
- Speak a bit more slowly
- Say what you want to say
- Be patient with yourself
- Pause for a moment before you start to speak
- Don't always expect the worst – sometimes it goes well
- Remember to congratulate yourself for trying things out
- Try to have a go at things
- Don't force the words – it just makes them harder to say
- The faster you try to speak the less you will manage to say
- Try not to bottle out!
- Talk about it rather than trying to hide it

Remember, you can't do all these things all the time – perhaps you could pick one you know works and try to do it a little more often, or perhaps try a new one!

Useful Websites

- The Michael Palin Centre for Stammering Children:
<https://www.whittington.nhs.uk/default.asp?c=25406>
- Stamma (formerly The British Stammering Association):
<https://stamma.org/>

Teachers may also find the following website helpful:

- The British Stammering Association online training resource for schools staff:
<http://www.stammeringineducation.net/>