

Show the child you are interested in what they are saying, not how they say it

- Try to maintain natural eye contact when the child is having difficulty talking
- Don't finish the child's sentences – this can be frustrating for them
- You could repeat back now and again any stammered words after they've finished, while responding to what they have said, e.g.

Child says: "I sssee a ca ca cat"

Adult says: "Oh yes, you see a cat. A lovely black cat"

Turn Taking

- Be clear about taking turns in the setting and help the children to manage turn taking. This means that children who stammer know they will be able to have their say

Think about how quickly you might be speaking

- Children often stammer more when they are excited or competing to speak
- Try to be calm yourself during activities, and keep your speech calm and unhurried – it helps if you pause now and again to model thinking time
- If the situation allows, it might be helpful to say something like "It sounds as if you've got something interesting to tell me, let's sit down so you can tell me all about it"

Giving advice about how to speak can increase frustration

- You can really help by not making the child feel that their talking is 'bad' or 'wrong' in any way
- DON'T ask the child to stop and start again, calm down, slow down or take a big breath. This draws attention to a problem and can make them self-conscious about speaking

If the child gets really stuck and distressed about his speech, it's OK to talk about it

- Re-assure the child – you could say something like “It’s OK, you’re still learning to talk, I’m listening”, or “It’s hard to say that, lots of children get stuck sometimes”
- Give positive feedback about speaking like ‘That’s interesting’ or ‘Thank you for explaining that’; this will help them to feel more confident about talking and encourage them to talk more

Deal with difficult questions

- Children may naturally be curious and ask questions eg “Why does Ben talk like that?” Respond honestly – eg “Ben sometimes gets his words stuck. He knows what he wants to say so we can help him by giving him a little bit more time”

Discuss with parents

- The child may already have been referred to a speech and language therapist and you will have had a report about the assessment. If the parents have not mentioned the stammer, check with them about how much it happens at home and whether they would like to see a speech and language therapist.

Stammering affects about 1 child in 12 between the age of 2 and 5 years. While the underlying causes are not fully understood, we know that parents do NOT cause stammering – also called stuttering or dysfluency. Around 75% of children outgrow this phase, but for some it can continue into adulthood. Treatment before the age of 7 years can make a difference. Please contact your speech and language therapist if you have any questions or concerns.

You can find out more about stammering on the British Stammering Association website: www.stamma.org