

For further information about this service contact:

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Notes

Speech and Language Therapy Service Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Stammering

If you require this information in a different format such as in large print or on audio tape, or in a different language please contact the service on the details above.

If you have any compliments about this service or suggestions for improvements, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 0300 131 1000 (charges may apply depending on your network) or email: ccs-tr.pals@nhs.net.

For free, confidential health advice and information 24 hours a day, 365 days a year please contact NHS 111.

Talking and Fluency

Learning to talk, like learning to walk, is never completely smooth and does not happen straight away.

Young children often stop, pause, start again and stumble over words when they are learning to talk.

Between the ages of 2 and 5 years, it is normal for a child to repeat words and phrases and hesitate with “um”s and “er”s when he is sorting out what to say next. However about 5% of children stammer for a time when they are learning to talk.

Many find it easier to talk fluently as they get older. Others continue to find talking difficult and often get stuck.

The words “stammering” and “stuttering” are the same thing; it may also be referred to as dysfluency.

Where can I go for help?

If you feel that further help and support is needed, contact your local Speech and Language Therapist again -

For pre-school children, please come along to one of our drop-ins (see our website for dates and venues:

www.cambscommunityservices/what-we-do/children-young-peoplehealthservices/specialist-services/childrens-speech-and-language-therapy) or ring 01223 218063.

If your child is at school, please ask their teacher to speak to the link Speech and Language Therapist for that school.

Websites that you may find informative include:

The British Stammering Association: www.stammering.org

The Michael Palin Centre for Stammering Children: www.stammeringcentre.org

Should I talk about it with my child?

Try and deal with the difficulties your child is currently having with speaking in the same way as you would deal with any other difficulty he may have, e.g. eating with a spoon or cutting with scissors.

If you feel it is appropriate, acknowledge the difficulty in a matter-of-fact way, without making it too much of a big deal that may result in him feeling self-conscious.

Say something encouraging if your child is looking distressed or embarrassed just as you would if he were distressed or embarrassed about anything else.

You could say something like -

“I can hear those words/sounds are a bit hard for you at the moment – don't worry. It can be like that sometimes when you are learning to talk.”

Showing pity or making light of problems (if there are any) is inappropriate.

Assume a basic attitude of interest, without claiming to find an immediate solution or to have an answer for all of the child's questions.

Once you have made a start, further talks are generally easier.

What is Stammering?

You may notice your child: ·

- is repeating whole words (“And-and-and-and-and- I want one too”)
- is repeating parts of words several times (“mu-mu-mu-mummy”)
- cannot seem to get started and no sound comes out for several seconds (“..... I got a teddy”)
- is stretching sounds in a word (“I want a ssssstory”)
- is putting extra effort into saying his words
- has tense, jerky speech.

These examples vary for each child; you may hear some or all of these when your child talks. The frequency of stammers will often vary depending on the situation, e.g. whether he is relaxed or excited, whether he is talking to friends or strangers.

Stammering may come and go - you may notice his speech is fluent for several days, weeks or months at a time, then he stumbles and speaking becomes difficult again.

It is not known exactly why some children stammer; it is likely that a combination of factors is involved. There is no evidence that parents cause stammering. It often runs in families and occurs worldwide in all cultures and social groups.

What can I do to help?

It is essential to accept your child's speech at this time. Remain observant of his speaking patterns but try and resist seeing it as a 'problem'.

Although stammering is not caused by parents in any way, your anxiety can easily transfer itself on to your child, who may come to feel he is doing something wrong or that it is a problem in some way.

- Do look at your child when he speaks and show an interest in WHAT he is saying, rather than the WAY he is saying it.
- Do be patient by giving him time to get the words out.
- Do be a good model – i.e. do not rush your own speech. It will make it easier for him to follow what you are saying and help him feel less rushed. If you pause for one second before answering or asking him a question, then this too will create a less hurried way of speaking.
- Do use the same sort of sentences your child does – keep them short and simple.
- Do give your child a special time each day with one or other parent when he chooses what to do and is given personal attention, not being interrupted and not struggling to talk over others.
- Do ensure good sleeping habits. A child will stumble over his words if he is tired.
- Do be consistent in your handling - aim for a minimum of rules but stick to them.
- Do praise your child for the things he does well, as this will build up his confidence.

What shouldn't I do?

- Avoid treating your child differently.
- Avoid letting him know you are worried.
- Avoid labelling him as a stammerer/stutterer.
- Avoid putting him under pressure to 'speak well' or do 'good speech'.
- Avoid teaching your child tricks, like taking a deep breath.
- Avoid encouraging him to 'perform' or 'recite' in front of visitors and/or strangers. Don't demand speech, e.g. "Tell aunty what you're going to do on your birthday".
- Avoid interrupting him or trying to help him out by providing the word for him.
- Avoid correcting his pronunciation or grammar mistakes.
- Avoid bombarding him with questions as this can be very demanding for young children. Questions remove a child's choice about whether to talk or not. They could interrupt his train of thought which could lead to more stammering.
Try turning some of them into statements, for example:
"Where are your shoes?" becomes "I can't find your shoes."
"What did you do today?" becomes "You look like you've been painting to day."

Some of this advice will not be easy to put into practice straight away.

Perhaps you could home in on 1-2 things initially then try to add another one, etc.