

That Speech Lady: Information for School Staff

School-Aged Children Who Stammer



Hello. I hope this guide provides a helpful starting point for supporting children who stammer. Stammering is a natural variation in how people communicate. It doesn't reflect a child's intelligence or what they want to say, it's simply a different way of speaking.

Over the years, our understanding of stammering and how to best support those who stammer has evolved significantly. My goal is to share some of the latest evidence and guidance to help you feel more supported and informed.

⚠ Disclaimer: This resource is designed to provide helpful information for school staff. It is not a substitute for professional speech and language therapy. Every child has unique needs, and personalised assessments and guidance from a qualified speech and language therapist are essential to support them fully.

The strategies and advice offered here are general guidelines and may not suit every child's situation. Some content may refer to external websites or materials; please check these sources for relevance and accuracy, as they may change over time.

If you have specific concerns or would like more tailored advice, please reach out to a qualified speech and language therapist. Please note that use of this information is at your own discretion and risk.

💬 What is Stammering?

Stammering, also known as stuttering, is a unique way some people speak. It's important to understand that there is no single, universally agreed-upon definition of stammering. Historically, it was often viewed through a medical lens and labelled as a "disorder" that needed fixing. Perspectives are now shifting, and stammering is increasingly recognised as simply a different way of speaking, not something that must be corrected.

People who stammer report stammering feels like a loss of control. They know what they want to say, but they have trouble saying what they want, when they want.

At its core, stammering is a neurologically-based speech difference, meaning it's related to how the brain processes speech. This can make it challenging for a person to physically produce sounds and words.



When a child stammers, you may notice some of the following behaviours:

- **Repetitions:** Repeating sounds, syllables, or words (e.g., "My name is A-A-A-A-Amir").
- **Prolongations:** Stretching or extending sounds (e.g., "On Sssssssaturday I play football").
- **Blocks:** Pausing before or during speech, where it seems like the sound is "stuck" (e.g., a pause before saying "----Can I have a drink please?").

These speech patterns can happen at any point in a sentence and may last for varying amounts of time, from a brief moment to several seconds. You may also notice other movements in their body such as eye blinking, head nodding or hand/foot tapping.

It's important to know that stammering isn't just the physical aspects of speech. It also involves how a child feels about their speech, how others respond to it and how they manage their stammer in daily life. For some children, stammering isn't a problem. For others, it can be more challenging. Some children may try to appear fluent by hiding or avoiding their stammer. This is called *covert stammering*. It happens when someone changes their words or how they speak to avoid stammering, and it can be exhausting.

How Common Is It?

- Stammering can affect anyone, regardless of ethnicity, gender, personality, intelligence, wealth or education.
- Between 5-8% of children will start stammering at some point. 75-80% of these children are likely to stop stammering as they get older (Reilly et al. 2009, Yairi & Ambrose, 2013).
- Around 1% of people worldwide stammer, which is over 80 million people (Yairi & Ambrose, 2013)

It is important to recognise that stammering is a valid part of communication for some children, and it's perfectly okay for it to be part of their speech journey.

When Should I Be Concerned?

It can be difficult to predict who might need support, especially as stammering can be variable. Early support can help children feel confident and supported, whether they continue to stammer or not. If any of the following signs apply, it may be helpful to speak with the child's parent(s) and consider a referral to a speech and language therapist:



1. Impact on Daily Life

Communication Difficulties: If you notice a child's stammer is making it harder for them to express themselves or is causing frustration, it could be a sign they may benefit from additional support. Effective communication is important, and speech and language therapy can help children build confidence in their ability to express themselves.

Avoiding Speaking Situations: If a child appears to be avoiding situations where they have to speak, such as classroom discussions, group work, or in the playground, this could be a sign that they're feeling self-conscious about their speech. Support can help boost their confidence and encourage them to participate more comfortably.

2. Thoughts and Feelings

Frustration or Anxiety: Observe how the child feels about their speech. If they seem frustrated, anxious, or upset when trying to speak, it may be affecting their emotional well-being. Addressing these feelings early on can help them feel more in control and less anxious about speaking.

Comments from Your Child: If a child expresses concern about how they speak, such as saying they don't like the way they talk or they feel embarrassed, it's important to listen. These feelings are valid, and seeking support can help them navigate these emotions in a positive way.

3. Feedback from Others

Comments from Peers or Adults: If other children or adults make comments that seem to bother the child, or if they experience teasing because of their speech, it's important to step in. External pressure can make a child feel more anxious and affect their self-esteem. A supportive approach can help them feel more comfortable in social situations.

4. Tension and Struggle

Struggle vs. Stammering: Children who stammer may experience physical tension or struggle during moments of stammering. Some children may try to hide their stammer or avoid speaking altogether because of fear or anxiety. It's important to look for signs of physical tension and avoidance behaviours. Whilst stammering isn't something that needs "fixing", we can support children to reduce physical tension, struggle and avoidance behaviours, although we may not work on this immediately.

5. Parental Concerns

Feeling Unsure About How to Help: It's common for parents to feel uncertain about what to say or do to



support their child who stammers. As a member of school staff, you may feel the same way. You might worry about giving the wrong advice or not knowing the most up-to-date guidance. Having clear, evidence-based information can make a big difference. It can help you feel more confident in supporting children who stammer and can also play an important role in preventing any negative thoughts or feelings a child may develop about their stammer.

Trust Your Instincts: If you have a gut feeling a child might need extra support, trust that instinct, it's often right. Even if you're unsure, reaching out to the child's parent(s) can be a great first step. Speech and language therapists are there to help you figure out what a child needs, whether it's a little guidance or more in-depth support. It will be up to the parents to decide if they would like this support.

💖 What Can I Do To Help?

Acceptance is Key: Help the child who stammers understand that it's okay to stammer and that it doesn't need to be "fixed." Everyone speaks differently, and different speech patterns make us unique. Consider sharing stories about famous people who stammers, such as Ed Sheeran or Emily Blunt, to show them they are not alone. You can also introduce them to inspiring role models through Action for Children's Stambassadors program: <https://actionforstammeringchildren.org/stambassadors/>.

Avoid Pressure to "Fix" the Stammer: Avoid asking children to "speak clearly" or to "speak slower." This can increase anxiety and make talking harder for children who stammer. Instead, allow them to speak at their own pace, without interruption and with full acceptance of how they communicate.

Quality one-on-one Special Time: If you can, set aside some special time (5 or 10 minutes) to engage in activities the child who stammers enjoys, such as playing games, drawing or reading together. Give them your undivided attention without other distractions (where possible!). This one-on-one time can strengthen your bond and help them feel valued and supported. It also gives them the opportunity to express themselves freely without fear of being judged.

Give them Time: One of the simplest and most effective ways to support children who stammer is to give them time to speak. Try not to interrupt or finish their sentences as it might make them feel rushed or self-conscious. By being patient and giving them space, you can help them feel calmer and more confident.

Celebrate their Strengths: Focus on the child's strengths and positive qualities outside of their speech. Praise them for their creativity, kindness or sense of humour. Encourage them to feel proud of who they are, including the way they communicate. Building their self-esteem will make them feel more confident

about expressing themselves. Praise them for their effort in communicating, regardless of how fluently they speak. Focus on the process rather than the outcome: “You did a brilliant job at explaining how you made this. I love hearing what you say!”



Speak with Parents: Parents know their child the best, and they may already have helpful strategies or speech and language support in place. Every child who stammers is unique, and what helps one child may not be helpful for another. I have created a free guide for parents which is very similar to this one. You are welcome to share this link so parents can download their free guide:

<https://thatspeechlady.co.page/guide>

How Can Speech and Language Therapy Help?

At That Speech Lady, therapy is tailored to children's unique needs, combining evidence-based approaches with specialist knowledge in stammering. Whilst professional expertise is important, the child is the expert in their own experience. Together, we work as a team to explore what works best for them.

Therapy for school-aged children may include:

- Exploring and understanding stammering
- Encouraging openness and self-advocacy
- Reducing barriers to communication
- Learning strategies to make speaking feel easier and more comfortable
- Building confidence and self-acceptance
- Strengthening communication skills
- Reflecting on thoughts and feelings about stammering
- Embracing and feeling okay to stammer

This approach can help children grow in confidence, communicate comfortably and feel positive about their way of speaking.

What If I Need More Support?

If you would like to stay connected, you can join my email list here: <https://thatspeechlady.co.page/email>

You are very welcome to contact me through my website <https://www.thatspeechlady.co.uk> or send me an email: lauren@thatspeechlady.co.uk I specialise in stammering and offer independent speech and language therapy in my local area (Southwater, Horsham, West Sussex) and online sessions for those who are further away. I offer high quality training sessions for school staff that can be tailored to exactly what you need, at a time suitable for you. Please get in touch for more details.



You can also contact your local National Health Service (NHS) and refer children to Speech and Language Therapy (there is no charge for this service). You can also find other independent speech and language therapists via the Association of Speech and Language Therapists in Independent Practice (ASLTIP): <https://asltip.com/find-a-speech-therapist/>

What Other Resources Do You Recommend?

There are lots of great resources full of insights, inspiration and information about stammering. Here are some of my favourites:

Websites

<https://stamma.org>, <http://stutteringiscool.com/>, <https://www.spacetostutter.org/>
<https://www.stutteringcommons.org/>
<https://michaelpalincentreforstammering.org/about-stammering/>

Books

The Boy Who Made Everyone Laugh by Helen Rutter: <https://shop.scholastic.co.uk/products/The-Boy-Who-Made-Everyone-Laugh-Helen-Rutter-9780702300851>

I Talk Like A River by Jordan Scott: <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/book-recommendations/bookfinder/i-talk-like-a-river/>

When The Stammer Came To Stay by Maggie O'Farrell:

<https://www.walker.co.uk/9781529504286/when-the-stammer-came-to-stay/>

Campaigns

It's how we talk by Stamma: <https://stamma.org/about-us/campaigns/its-how-we-talk>

Find the right words by Stamma: <https://stamma.org/about-us/campaigns/findtherightwords>

Video clips

Wait, wait, I'm not finished yet by the Michael Palin

Centre: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibn04rxRo_I&t=75s

Stambassadors: <https://actionforstammeringchildren.org/get-involved/stambassadors/>

Blogs

<https://www.redefiningstammering.co.uk/2018/11/> by Sam Simpson, an excellent speech and language therapist, person-centred counsellor and advocate for the stammering community.

<https://www.stutterology.com/> Ezra is a person who stammers and an amazing advocate for the

stammering community.



Podcasts

<http://stutteringiscool.com/stuttering-is-cool-podcast/>

<https://stamma.org/resources/podcast>

I hope you have found this guide useful. As an independent speech and language therapist, I am available if you need further support.



Stay connected: <https://thatspeechlady.co.page/email>

Share my free guides with others: <https://thatspeechlady.co.page/guide>

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