

That Speech Lady: Information for Parents

Teenagers Who Stammer



Hello. I hope this guide provides a helpful starting point for supporting your teenager who stammers. Stammering is a natural variation in how people communicate. It doesn't reflect a teenager'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 confident and informed.

⚠ Disclaimer: This resource is designed to provide helpful information for parents of teenagers who stammer. It is not a substitute for professional speech and language therapy. Every teenager 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 teenager'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 for your teenager, 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 person 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 you pass the butter 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 person feels about their speech, how others respond to it and how they manage their stammer in daily life. For some people, stammering isn't a problem. For others, it can be more challenging. Some people 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 mentally and emotionally 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).
- In the UK, approximately 700,000 people stammer.
- Approximately 75% of adults who stammer are men (Bloodstein, 1995).
- Not every person who stammers will require speech and language therapy.

? 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 your teenager feel confident and supported, whether they continue to stammer or not. If any of the following signs apply, it may be helpful to contact a speech and language therapist:



1. Impact on Daily Life

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

Avoiding Speaking Situations: If your teenager seems to be avoiding situations where they have to speak, such as school presentations, group projects, or friend and family gatherings, 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: Ask your teenager how they feel about their speech. If they feel frustrated, anxious, or upset when trying to speak, it may be affecting their emotional well-being. Addressing these feelings early on can help your teenager feel more in control and less anxious about speaking.

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

3. Feedback from Others

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

4. Tension and Struggle

Struggle vs. Stammering: Your teenager may experience physical tension or struggle during moments of stammering. Some teenagers 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 teenagers 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 teenager who stammers. 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 your teenager and can also play an important role in preventing negative thoughts or feelings your teenager may develop about their stammer.



Trust Your Instincts: As a parent, you know your teenager best. If you have a gut feeling that they might need extra support, trust that instinct, it's often right. Even if you're unsure, reaching out for advice can be a great first step. Speech and language therapists are there to help you figure out what your teenager needs, whether it's a little guidance or more in-depth support. They'll be glad you reached out and ready to help you and your teenager on this journey.

What Can I Do To Help My Teenager?

Be a Safe Space: Let your teenager know that stammering is a valid way of speaking. Encourage open conversations and invite them to share their experiences. Listen with empathy and understanding, validating their feelings without judgment. For example, you might say, "That sounds really hard," if they express frustration or anxiety about their stammer. While it's natural for parents to want to "fix" things, sometimes what your teenager needs most is for you to simply listen and allow them to express their emotions. It's important to let them know that it's okay to have difficult days, and that their worth isn't defined by how fluently they speak. Offering small reassurances, such as, "I'm proud of you for sharing this with me" or "Thank you for telling me that" can help them feel heard, supported and valued.

Give them Time: Give your teenager the time they need to express themselves without interrupting or finishing their sentences. Avoid making their stammer the main focus of conversations. Instead, focus on the content of what they're saying, rather than how they're saying it.

Introduce Role Models: Share stories of famous people who stammer, like Ed Sheeran or Gareth Gates, to show that stammering doesn't have to hold anyone back. You can also introduce them to inspiring role models through Action for Children's Stambassadors program:

<https://actionforstammeringchildren.org/stambassadors/>.

Celebrate their Strengths: Focus on your teenager'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. Encourage them to participate in clubs, sports or hobbies where they can build upon their strengths and form friendships.

Speak with School Staff: Your teenager spends a large part of their day at school and it is important school staff understand your teenager's stammer and how best to support them. Every teenager who stammers is unique, and what helps one teenager may not be helpful for another. I have created a free guide for school staff which is very similar to this one. You are welcome to share this link so school staff 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 meet your teenager's unique needs, combining evidence-based approaches with specialist knowledge in stammering. Whilst professional expertise is important, your teenager is the expert in their own experiences. Together, we work as a team to explore what strategies and approaches work best for them. Therapy for teenagers may include:

- Exploring and understanding stammering
- Encouraging openness and self-advocacy
- Addressing 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 empower your teenager to communicate with confidence, express themselves authentically 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 live further away.

You can also contact your local National Health Service (NHS) and refer your teenager 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

Stuttering is Cool: A guide to talking in a fast-paced world by Daniele

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

Stammering Pride and Prejudice: Difference not Defect by Patrick Campbell, Christopher Constantino and Sam Simpson <https://www.ir-press.co.uk/product/stammering-pride-prejudice/>

You can read chapter one for free here: <https://www.redefiningstammering.co.uk/stammering-pride-and-prejudice-difference-not-defect-first-anniversary-celebration/>

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>

No diversity without disfluency by Stamma: <https://stamma.org/about-us/campaigns/no-diversity-without-disfluency>

Video clips

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

Why you should embrace your stammer by Juan V. Lopez: <https://youtu.be/8J5RUvs2rZA>

Honest Speech by Erin Schick: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8XOyY54-Ew>

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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