

# Stammering information and advice

Information for family members and staff

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## What is stammering?

It's also referred to as stuttering or dysfluency. A child who is stammering may show some or all of the following features:

**Repetitions** – this may be sounds, syllables, words or phrases.

‘I-I-I want to go....’

‘when-when-when is it playtime?’

‘w-w-w-what do we have to do?’

**Prolongations** - stretching the sounds out.

‘liiiiii want to go...’

‘Saaaaa you later’

**Blocking** - getting stuck on a sound or word.

No sound comes out at all initially.

You may notice that children with a stammer:

- tap their leg or arm with the palm of their hands to help them get into a rhythm
- have tension in their face, eyes, lips and jaw
- elongate sounds in a word (eg, “Mmmmy name is Aaaaandy.”)
- avoid saying certain words
- block on words (so you’ll only hear silence while their mouth is open)
- repeat sounds or words
- attempt to manage their breathing
- avoid eye contact
- pretend to have forgotten what they wanted to say
- are not keen to contribute to conversation with new people
- may not offer answers in class.

## What can I do to help someone who stammers?

- Be patient and give the child time to finish. Do not interrupt or finish off words.
- Listen attentively, and echo back some content so that the child feels that **what** they said is more important than **how** they said it.
- Treat a pupil with a stammer the same way you treat pupils who do not. No one likes to be treated differently.
- Resist giving advice such as “Take your time”.
- The more anxious the child feels, the more likely they’ll be to stammer. Ensure your body language is relaxed and you are not putting pressure on a child to speak.
- Slow your own speech with natural pauses, signalling that there is no need to rush.
- If the child is struggling to speak, acknowledge the effort they are making with a kind comment, ‘You did really well there to say that word’.
- Consider how you refer to the stammer and avoid negative language such as “the stammer is really bad today” or “he/she has a terrible impediment”. Instead, accept the stammer as a **difference** in communicating rather than a **difficulty**. The impact of a stammer on a child is often determined by the reaction they receive to stuttering and how they feel about their stutter. If someone feels bad about their stutter, they are more likely to struggle.






For **teachers**, consider the following advice:

- Judge when the child seems to want to talk about their speech and offer the chance to do so in a one-to-one situation.
- Consider how you take the register and allow non-verbal response if a child is finding it hard to answer under pressure. Alternatively, avoid the traditional way of calling out the register and allow children to ‘check in’ on arrival to the class by putting their name in a box/basket etc.
- Always encourage them to take part in speaking activities – but you should certainly ask them beforehand, so you know what they’re comfortable with.
- If doing a reading aloud activity, consider getting your pupils to work in groups or to read in pairs.
- Praise a child when they’ve done something good and worth acknowledging. Confidence is key for pupils who stammer.
- Be aware of any bullying that is taking place. Bullying should be dealt with immediately. A useful resource if required is: <https://respectme.org.uk/>.
- Look at the video developed for teachers called ‘Wait, wait, I’m not finished yet’ made by Michael Palin centre and accessible on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/je7mlAzyD7A>.



## Further resources

<b>STAMMA website</b> <a href="https://stamma.org/resources/professionals/teachers">https://stamma.org/resources/professionals/teachers</a>	
<b>Top Tips for Talking with a Child who Stutters on YouTube</b> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTpckAufNDE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTpckAufNDE</a>	
<b>Michael Palin Centre for Stammering</b> <a href="https://michaelpalincentreforstammering.org/">https://michaelpalincentreforstammering.org/</a>	
<b>My Stammering Tap and My Stammering Child animations (NHS Humber)</b> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGN0BB0HaCo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGN0BB0HaCo</a>	