



STAMMERING IN PRE-SCHOOLERS

Stammering which begins in early childhood is known as developmental stammering. It is often hereditary – about 60% of people who stammer have another family member who stammers.

CAUSES

Stammering is primarily a neurological, not psychological, condition. What is clear is that parents do not cause stammering. The way you respond to your child's stammer can make a real difference.

REFERRALS

Speech and language therapy is free for children who stammer. To find your local NHS speech and language therapist, look online – eg, if you live in Leeds, search for 'Children speech and language therapy Leeds'.

We can help you find your local service – call us free on 0808 802 0002, weekdays, 10am–noon; 6pm–8pm. Normally you will be able to refer your child yourself, either by completing a form or giving the department a ring. Or ask your GP or health visitor.

THERAPY

The first visit will be relaxed and informal. The therapist will want to find out as much as possible about your child and assess their speech and language skills through observation and play.

Based on this first meeting and discussions with you, the therapist may decide to offer you advice and arrange another appointment in a few months' time or offer some therapy. There are two approaches for pre-school children:

Indirect Therapy

The therapist will work with you to create a communication-friendly environment for your child. A common example of this type of approach is called Parent-Child Interaction Therapy.

Direct Therapy

The therapist will work directly with your child to help them speak more easily. You'll play an important part in supporting your child to use these skills every day. One example of direct therapy is called the [Lidcombe Programme](#).

GETTING HELP

[British Stammering Association Facebook Support Group](#)

Moderated by BSA staff and volunteers, this group provides a space for people to share experiences, ask for advice and talk openly about stammering. It's a closed group, so posts there will only be seen by group members.

[UK Network for Parents of Children who Stammer](#)

A Facebook group for parents of children who stammer to support one another and share their experiences. This is a closed group, so only members can post and respond.

[stamma.org](#)

Our website is here for you. We have information for parents. There's a whole therapy section. The [Your Voice](#) section includes stories from parents of children who stammer, some who stammer themselves and others who don't.

[Michael Palin Centre for Stammering](#)

Provide a helpline for parents of children who stammer, weekdays, 9am–5pm on 020 3316 8100. They also offer a consultation service to families living outside the UK.

[Action for Stammering Children](#)

A charity supporting children and young people who stammer.

[Association of Speech & Language Therapists in Independent Practice](#)

The place to find a private speech and language therapist. Use their advanced search to find one who specialises in working with children who stammer. Tel: 020 3002 3704.

Keep up-to-date with our campaigns, get information and support. Join us or just subscribe. It's free.

[Stamma.org/join](#)

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In preschoolers, stammering is not uncommon.

Stammering, or stuttering, affects up to 8% of children. In most children this will be short-lived. Stammering isn't caused by nerves. It's mainly a neurological and often hereditary condition.

It is normal for a child to repeat words and phrases, and to hesitate with "um"s and "er"s. Up to 8%, or about one in every 12 children, will experience stammering, normally between the ages of two and five.

Stammering is when your child:

- stretches sounds ("I want a ssstory.")
- repeats parts of words several times ("Mu-mu-mu-mu-mummy.")
- gets stuck on the first sound of a word so no sound comes out for a few seconds ("...I got a teddy.")
- puts extra effort into saying specific sounds or words. You may notice tension around the eyes, lips and jaw
- holds their breath or takes a big breath before speaking, so that their breathing seems uneven
- uses body movements to help get a word out - stamps their foot or moves their head
- loses eye-contact when stuck on a word
- tries to hide their stammer: pretend they've forgotten what they want to say, change a word they have started to say or go unusually quiet.

You can reduce the pressure a child may feel when talking by doing the following:

1. Slow down your own rate of speech, but don't tell your child to slow down or take a deep breath.
2. Have one-on-one time (just five minutes every day) with your child, where they aren't competing for attention with tasks or other family members.
3. Ask one question at a time and give them plenty of time to answer.
4. Use short, simple sentences.
5. Keep natural eye-contact with your child.
6. Listen to what your child is saying, not how they say it.
7. Pause before answering questions.
8. Make sure everyone in the conversation gets a turn.
9. Acknowledge speech difficulties with reassurance and encouragement just as you would any other difficulty your child is having.

WHEN TO ACT

If you or your child are worried about stammering, then ask for your child to be assessed by a speech and language therapist who specialises in stammering.

While lots of children will grow out of stammering, it can still be hard for you and your child during this time and therapy can help.

The earlier you act the better, as there can be a bit of a wait to be seen.

A speech and language therapist will advise if your child needs therapy, and can help you and your child make sense of what's happening.

It's not easy to tell whether your child is going through a temporary stage of stammering or whether it will continue.

Signs that your child would benefit from therapy include:

- Your child is aged between two and three-and-a-half and the stammering has continued for more than a few months and become more noticeable.
- A family member stammers or used to stammer.
- Your child has some speech sound difficulties.
- Your child is aged three-and-a-half or over, and has just started stammering.

STAMMERS

RING US ON 0808 802 0002

Weekdays 10am-noon; 6pm-8pm. Free. Confidential. Anonymous.

Call us to talk through any concerns you have about your child and stammering. We're here to listen and provide support. We can help you find details of your local NHS service and talk through how best to support your child.