

Stammering

An Information Sheet for Parents of Older Children and Young People

What is Stammering?

Sounds like	Looks like	Feels like
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetitions: I-I-I can do it • Prolongations: Iiiiiiii can do it • Blocking (silent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tension • Looking away • Tapping feet • Shaking head 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding words • Negativity around talking 

- ✓ About 5% of children between 2 and 7 experience something like stammering. 1% of the adult population continue to stammer.
- ✓ Stammering includes repetitions of sounds, syllables, whole words and short phrases, stretching out of long sounds and vowels, and not being able to get started on a word or sentence.
- ✓ It is normal for this stammering to come and go. It can tend to be worse when children are tired or unwell or when life is particularly busy.
- ✓ Developmental and inherited factors can play a part in causing stammering, along with small differences in how efficiently the speech areas of the brain are working. It is very important that parents know that the causes of stammering are multifactorial and stammering is **not** caused by anything parents have done.
- ✓ There are many things parents can do to support a child or young person who stammers.

Supporting Older Children to Understand their Stammer

Thinking about **a bucket** is one way of understanding why some people stammer and others don't!



Every one of us has a bucket.

Everything that makes us who we are (e.g. our genetics, our personality, our nature) can add water to the bucket.

Things that are happening in our lives can also add water to the bucket (e.g. times of change, stress at school, busy environment, lots of people trying to talk at the same time, avoidance of things that appear tricky).

Sometimes, for some of us, the bucket is too small to hold all of the water in it and the water spills out over the edges. This is our stammer. Sometimes a little water spills over and sometimes *a lot* of water spills over.

There are times that *no matter what* we try to do, the water will spill out and **that's OK.**

Things that happen in our lives can also help to take water out of the bucket (e.g. a good night's sleep, some time to relax and de-stress, becoming more accepting of and comfortable with our stammer).

Supporting a Teenager who Stammers – Parent Tips

Managing Feelings

Managing and supporting feelings can be difficult with your child who stammers. The natural thing as a parent is to ask questions and try to fix things but it may be more helpful just being there and being quiet.

Label your own feelings, keeping communication about feelings open and honest and a part of every day life. This sends the message that it is okay to talk about feelings.

Acknowledge and validate your young person's feelings e.g. "I know it's frustrating when ..."



There are many practical ways to support a young person who stammers at home, including:



One-to One Time

Have short (5 minutes) one-to-one time with your child on a regular basis, when you are both calm and not in a rush and you are not likely to be interrupted.



The Importance of Routine

You have probably already noticed that there are times when your child is more fluent or stammers more.

You may have noticed what helps them to be more fluent (e.g. giving themselves more time or calming down) or less fluent (e.g. if they are tired or their routine has changed).

Your instincts are probably right! Think about your child's general well-being, their sleeping and eating habits, their health and their pace of life.



Answering Questions

Give your teenager plenty of time to respond to questions you are asking. Only ask one question at a time rather than lots of questions at once.

Sometimes comment rather than question, as questions can sometimes put young people under pressure e.g. instead of saying 'how was your day?' say 'you look like you had a good day'. This gives your child the option to respond rather than placing a demand on them to respond.



Family Discussions

Encourage your teenager who stammers to participate in family discussions at home. Encourage everyone to take turns in the conversation – sometimes using a talking object helps e.g. you can only talk when you are holding the ketchup bottle etc.



Talk Openly

If your teenager is aware of their stammer and willing to talk about it, ensure that stammering is talked about openly at home. This allows them the security of knowing that he or she can talk to you about how they are feeling about their stammer and that they are not alone.



Give your teenager ownership

It is important that teenagers feel in control of their communication. Talk with them about how they would like you to support their stammer and support the choices they make in addressing their speech.

Planning Sheet for Teenagers Who Stammer

This sheet can be completed by a young person who stammers with support from their parent(s) or completed by themselves and discussed with their parent(s)/family.

Ways that my family can support me at home:

How to respond when I stammer:

Answering questions:

During family discussions:

During family games:

Any other ideas about how my family can support my communication:

Useful Tools and Websites for Parents and Young People:



VIDEOS:

- 'Wait Wait I'm not finished yet' (on Youtube)
- 'My stammering tap': <https://vimeo.com/239094673>
- Stambassador Videos: <https://actionforstammeringchildren.org/get-involved/stambassadors/>



BOOKS:

- 'My Fantastic Elastic Brain'
- 'How to Talk so Kids will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk' (a communication toolkit for parents)



WEBSITES:

- British Stammering Association: www.stamma.org/get-support/parents
- Michael Palin Centre: <https://actionforstammeringchildren.org/about-stammering/>