How parents can help

We know that parents do NOT cause stammering (also called stuttering). Evidence shows that most children outgrow this phase over a few weeks or months, although at the time this can be hard to believe.

If you have concerns, we advise that you refer your child to a speech and language therapist (SLT). You can usually do this directly without seeing a GP.

Helpful tips for parents

The following ideas are very general – you may find some of these easier than others and some may work better for you and your child. Don’t try to do them all at once – select one or two at a time to begin with. Nothing works immediately, so gradually build up a few that seem to be helpful and discard the ones that are not. We all want to help the child who is struggling to speak.

1. **Show your child that you are interested in what they say, not how they say it.** Try to maintain natural eye-contact when they are having difficulty talking. Don't finish their sentences as this can be very frustrating
2. **Be supportive.** Respond to a speech difficulty in the same way that you would with any other difficulties that arise as they develop their skills, such as when they trip over or spill things. If you feel it's appropriate, acknowledge the difficulty in a matter-of-fact way, so that they don’t feel criticised. Avoid labelling the difficulty as stammering. You could use expressions like "bumpy speech" or "getting stuck” or create a description together
3. **If you speak quickly, slow down your own rate of speech when you talk to your child.** Telling them to slow down, start again or to take a deep breath is often unhelpful, but people will naturally copy the speech of others. Therefore, if you model a more relaxed way of speaking, their speech will slowly reflect this. Pausing for a second before you answer or ask a question can also help to feel less rushed.
4. **Be encouraging if your child gets upset about their speech, just as if they were upset about any other difficulty.** You could say something like "Don't worry, talking can be tricky sometimes when you're still learning
5. **Observe your child's speaking patterns but try to resist seeing it as a 'problem'.** Stammering is not caused by parents, but your anxiety can be passed on to your child, who may feel they are doing something wrong. In fact, they are just struggling a bit at the moment, and the stage may well pass.
6. **Set aside a few minutes at a regular time each day when you can give your full attention to your child in a calm, relaxed atmosphere.** You could follow their lead in playing or talking about something they like. Try to talk about the things you are doing together right now, not about things that happened in the past or planned future jobs.
7. **Reduce the number of questions you ask.** Always give your child plenty of time to answer one question before asking another. This way, they are less likely to feel under pressure. Keep your sentences short and simple and instead of asking questions, simply comment on what your child has said, thereby letting them know you are listening.
8. **Take turns to talk so that everyone in the family can speak without being interrupted.** This will reduce the amount that your child is interrupted, or that they interrupt others.
9. **Respond to your child's behaviour in the same way that you would with a child who does not stammer.** As with any other child, discipline needs to be appropriate and consistent.
10. **Try to avoid a hectic and rushed lifestyle.** Stammering can increase when your child is tired. Children who stammer respond well to a routine and structured environment at home and at nursery or playgroup. It is also helpful to establish regular sleep patterns and a regular healthy diet.

Further sources of information about stammering

**Stamma (Previously known as** **The British Stammering Association)**

✉️ The British Stammering Association, trading as Stamma

15 Old Ford Road

London E2 9PJ

📞 020 8983 1003

💻 <https://stamma.org/>

📧 [mail@stamma.org](mailto:mail@stamma.org)

**The Michael Palin Centre for Stammering Children**

✉️ Action for Stammering Children

Michael Palin Centre

13 – 15 Pine Street

London, EC1R 0JG

📞 020 3960 5003

**💻** [www.stammeringcentre.org](http://www.stammeringcentre.org)

📧 [info@stammeringchildren.org](mailto:info@stammeringchildren.org)