

Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

General Facts about Stammering

Some facts about stammering

- Some children are born with a vulnerability to a stammer.
- Stammering often begins between the ages of two and seven and is seen in between five and eight percent of pre-school children.
- Stammering in young children tends to come and go.
- It is very rare that children stammer on purpose
- More boys than girls stammer (about 4 boys to every girl)
- Stammering can run in families
- There are many reasons why a child might stammer; stress, tiredness, illness or excitement can all increase stammering.
- There are many ways that adults can help a child with a stammer.

Developmental Stammering

Between the ages of 2 and 5 many children hesitate when they speak. This often happens when children are developing their talking. Children may stop and start at the beginning of a sentence and repeat words as they learn this new skill called 'talking'. It is natural for children to make mistakes as they are learning and most children are not aware or upset by these.

Some children may hesitate more often and repeat or stretching out of sounds and words. They may show signs of struggle or frustration when they talk. There are many different reasons why a child might struggle in this way. Reasons can include:

- A strong family history of stammering
- Being a boy
- Co-ordination difficulties
- Fast talking

- Advanced or delayed language skills
- Difficulty with clarity of speech
- A shy or reserved child
- A very active child
- Sensitivity
- Ill health
- Tiredness
- Excitement

Demands or pressures on the child can also increase the stammer. (Time pressures to speak, or trying to understand or use more complex language, pressures they put on themselves). If these pressures continue the amount of struggle is likely to increase.

At first the child might be unaware of the difficulty but once they do notice it they may start to use try to hide or stop the stammer. The more they try, the tenser they become and the more the stammering increases. Children may be sensitive to their new way of speaking or people's reactions to it. Children naturally want to please adults and if they see that the stammer upsets or worries them, they will try to stop stammering when they can't. It is common for children to speak more easily when playing alone or talking to pets etc. This shows that the stammer can be due to pressures and demands.

Further information can be found on the website for the British Stammering Association (www.stamma.org)