

Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

Stammering and Low Confidence

Shyness, anxiety or lack of confidence

Some children can be quieter than others in a new situation even though they may be very confident at home. They may need more time to settle with new people and in new places. Some children are very aware of other people's feelings and can worry if someone is ill or upset. They may worry about being late for school/nursery or meeting a new person. Giving specific praise is an excellent way of building self-confidence and allowing children to value themselves and their achievements. We all praise our children but how we do it can make a big difference especially to a child with a stammer.

What you can do to help

- Giving your child praise for their general communication skills helps to take the emphasis away from the talking difficulty. You can praise your child for good listening, remembering, waiting a turn to talk, for their ideas or for new words.
- It is important NOT to praise your child for not stammering. Children will have times when they don't stammer that they are not consciously controlling. If they are praised for this they may begin to think that stammering is 'doing something wrong.' This can lead to more anxiety when they do stammer and they may stammer more.
- Specific praise can be very helpful. This is where you comment on particular details rather than making a general statement e.g. rather than saying, 'that's a good drawing' say 'That's a really colourful drawing. I love the blue and green at the top.' Specific praise helps the child to see that you have taken time to notice what they have done and so they are more likely to believe that it is true. This helps to develop confidence.
- If your child is worried about going to a new place or meeting new people, talk about things they may be familiar with. Take pictures of the people or the place and make a scrapbook that you can talk about before the event. Use stories to talk about the events and activities so that they become familiar. Walk past the place before you have to make visit. When new people come to visit, encourage them to not to ask your child lots of questions but give your child time to play on their own and then join in when they feel settled.

- A child who has a tendency to worry can benefit from using a 'worry tree' or 'worry train'. This is a picture that you make with detachable parts e.g. leaves and flowers, wheels and windows. The main picture can be put on a wall where the family can see it and the small parts put in a bag next to it. Family members can write on a leaf or flower and then place them on the tree. The leaf can represent a worry, and a flower something that has been enjoyable or achieved. This helps a youngster to express their feelings more easily and to see others doing the same. It can be used as often or as little as needed.
- Use a visual timetable of activities that will happen during the day or week. This can be pictures or photographs. The timetable can be put in a place that can easily be seen and allows the child to know what will happen next. This also allows for changes in a routine where a new picture can be put on the timetable and helps a child to feel more settled when they are anxious.

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