

Stammering: Information for Playgroups and Nurseries

Between the ages of 2 and 5 most children show signs of hesitant or disrupted speech. This often happens when children are learning how to coordinate their talking and use longer sentences. Children may stop and start at the beginning of a sentence and repeat words and phrases 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 disruptions.

For some children they may go on to develop more frequent hesitations, repetitions or stretching out of sounds. They may show signs of struggle or frustration when they talk. There are many reasons why a child might struggle in this way and it will be different for each child.

A child who stammers should generally be treated the same as any other child and it is important not to draw attention to the stammer. The following strategies, however, will make talking easier.

- When a child has hesitations in their speech, allow them time to work through any mistakes without hurrying them or anticipating what they are going to say or finishing off their words for them.
- Avoid putting the child 'on the spot' by asking them to 'perform' nursery rhymes, particularly if they appear reluctant to do so or they have previously shown anxiety.
- Give the child the opportunity to talk when they have volunteered. In turn taking activities try and pick them early so that they do not have to wait and build up excitement before speaking.
- Help the child to understand general talking skills such as taking turns and listening. This will help them to feel that when it is their turn to talk they will have the attention from others.
- Give them good eye contact where possible when they are talking and go down to their

level to reduce an urgency to talk.

- Match the level of your language with that of the child. Avoid using long sentences and complicated words if the child is using more simple language.
- Avoid asking lots of questions but make use of commentary instead; describing what is happening and what you can see.
- Make use of visual timetables to help the child know what is going to happen next in the session. This helps to reduce any anxiety when children are quiet. .

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