

## Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

### Stammering in school-aged children

As children become older they may become aware of their stammer. They may start to use 'tricks' to help with their talking. Children and young people may do this when they feel that they are losing control. You might notice the following -

- Signs of physical tension or struggle e.g. facial grimaces/upper body tension
- Body movements at the same time as the stammer e.g. tapping the foot, swinging the arm or nodding the head.
- Running out of breath in the middle of a sentence or speaking when breathing in.
- Using 'filler' words e.g. 'erm' 'well' 'like' 'you know' to fill in any gaps or hesitations within sentences.
- Some children avoid saying certain words (e.g. try to change it to an 'easier' word) or some avoid speaking situations altogether e.g. speaking out in class, talking in a large group, in a shop or on the phone etc.
- Some children avoid speaking by pretending not to hear a question or pretending they don't know the answer—this is often in an attempt to hide their stammer.
- Loss of eye contact is common as children and young people become more aware of their stammer.
- Some children may be more anxious about their stammer and this can present itself in many ways.

#### What can be done to help?

If stammering is having an impact on a child's participation in education, social or other activities, it's important to refer to the Speech and Language Therapy service as there are many things we can do to help.

At home and school, we would advise you to be open with your child in talking about their stammer and the feelings associated with it.

Continue to use the strategies on the 'general strategies' handout as these strategies will continue to support a child who stammers of any age.

Don't be afraid to acknowledge moments of stammering but try to give praise too e.g. by saying 'I could see that was tricky for you, well done for carrying on!'