

## Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

# Stammering Demands and Capacities

### Balancing talking skills with demands and pressures.

Stammering occurs more when there are high demands placed on a child to talk and the child doesn't have the capacity or ability to meet these demands. You can think of this like a see-saw, where one side is the child's ability to talk and the other side is the pressures or demands to talk. Some of the demands and capacities are outlined below.

#### DEMANDS

##### **Demands from environment:**

- Language levels of adults and other children (i.e. using complex language)
- Adults speaking quickly
- The child being interrupted
- Feeling hurried to talk

##### **Development of language skills:**

This includes the child's general speech and language skills including grammar, speech sounds, understanding and use of language.

##### **Emotional demands:**

Birthdays, religious festivals, life changes including moving house, new babies at home all impact on a child's stammer. Negative reactions from others can also be an emotional demand.

##### **Self imposed demands:**

This includes when children have high self expectations or may be described as a 'perfectionist'

#### CAPACITIES

To speak in full sentences the child must have a range of skills including:

- Know lots of words
- Put words together in sentence
- Think quickly of the right words, phrases and sentences in order to say what they mean
- Be able to listen and understand
- Know which sounds to use in words
- Have good control over their muscles to co-ordinate breathing and speaking

**NOTE:** speaking will be more difficult when the child feels upset, unwell, tired or over- excited.

## Demands and Capacities: how to help

- If the pressures or demands to speak are more than the child's ability, the child is more likely to stammer. Adults can support a child's stammer by working out how to reduce some of the pressures being placed on the child.
- Some children, despite pressures being reduced, will go onto stammer into adolescence and adulthood, because there is no cure for stammering. However, adults who stammer sometimes notice that they stammer more when under pressure. Therefore the demands and capacities model is still useful even with teenagers and adults who stammer.
- Nursery and school-life can contain lots of 'demands' on speaking as there is often an expectation that children will speak out, answer questions, manage turn taking with peers and as children get older they have to navigate more high-pressured speaking situations like oral exams.

For more information about demands and capacities and how this impacts stammering look at the following websites:

- STAMMA: [www.stamma.org](http://www.stamma.org)
- Michael Palin Centre for Stammering: [www.michaelpalincentre.org](http://www.michaelpalincentre.org)
- Action for Stammering Children: [www.actionforstammeringchildren.org](http://www.actionforstammeringchildren.org)

Videos:

- South Tees NHS Speech Therapist, Jessie explains the demands and capacities model in this short video on YouTube called '**Why do some children stammer?**'  
⇒ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-KgZ321qeQ>
- '**My Stammering Tap**' is an animated video where a child who stammers explains what it feels like to have a stammer.  
⇒ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-KgZ321qeQ>
- The Stuttering Foundation have created a video called '7 Tips for Talking with the Child Who Stutters' and this outlines some useful strategies for adults to use  
⇒ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTpckAufNDE>