

Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

Stammering - Interruptions and Waiting to Talk

Interruptions and distractions

If children are interrupted when they are talking they tend to forget what they want to say and the stammering may increase as they struggle to remember. When children are talking they need to be able to concentrate on what they are saying. If they have to compete to talk or there is an urgency to talk, the child will speed up their talking and the stammering may increase.

What you can do to help

- Always try to look at your child when they speak and allow them lots of time to finish what they are saying.
- Whenever possible make sure there are no other distractions during 'talking times'. For example, switch off the television or radio during family meal times.
- If your child wants to talk while you are doing things that need your full concentration (e.g. driving, cooking) tell them that you can't look at them but that you are listening.
- Encourage taking turns in conversation for all the family. When it is someone's turn to talk, others listen. Sometimes it can be helpful to have a talking stick or talking toy that each member of the family can hold when it is their turn to talk.

Listening and waiting

Often when a child wants to tell you something, there is urgency for them to talk and they may speak more quickly and might stammer more. A child may need to get your attention when you are busy with something else. If the child is worried that the adult may move away or be distracted pressure to get the words out will occur.

What you can do to help

- Give your child plenty of time and attention when they want to tell you something so that they can say what they have to say without rushing.
- Give your child an equal amounts of attention whether they are or are not stammering.

so that they don't begin to associate stammering with an increase in attention.

- If you can't give your child your full attention straight away, tell them that you will listen as soon as you can. Try to make this within a couple of minutes.
- If you sit next to your child when he is speaking it shows that you are listening and have lots of time. This naturally calms the talking situation down.
- Remember that your child will need to learn to take turns and wait for others to speak. If your child learns that they sometimes have to wait, then it will reduce any frustration when they don't always get immediate attention from others. This is, however, difficult for a young child and may take time. Make them wait for a short time at first and then slowly build this up.

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