

Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

Strategies to support teenagers who stammer

The following are ways adults can support children and teenagers who stammer during everyday conversations:

- Give them plenty of time to respond, letting them finish their own sentences. Try to avoid interrupting or making suggestions of things they could do to change their speech (i.e. stop, slow down, take a breath) – if interrupted, they may lose their train of thought or feel like their speech is being corrected.
- Don't finish off a person's sentence when they are stammering. Finishing off sentences is usually unhelpful as it can reduce self-confidence and increase frustration.
- Adults should use more pauses in their own speech and to use a slow relaxed style of speaking when talking to the young person – this will help to reduce the pace of the conversation and the feeling of needing to rush and will provide a good model for speed of talking.
- People often lose eye contact when stammering and it's helpful if you don't look away but give the same eye contact as you would if speaking to a teenager who is fluent. Keeping eye contact shows that you are listening to what they are saying rather than how they are saying it.
- Some teenagers will be happy to be chosen to speak on the spot or participate in presentations, whilst others will not feel confident and able to do so. Speak with the teenager to find out how they feel able to participate and make reasonable adjustments e.g. allowing the pupil who stammers to do a presentation 1:1 with the teacher instead of in front of the whole class.
- Speak to the teenager about their stammer and ask them if they have any preferences about how they would like to be spoken to. Every teenager who stammer has their own individual thoughts and feelings about it and no person who stammers is exactly the same, so it's best to speak to the individual themselves.

Some useful websites to gain more information about stammering and how to support stammering in school, college, and in the workplace:

- www.stamma.org
- www.michaelpalincenreforstammering.org
- www.actionforstammeringchildren.org