

SEND Bulletin NO. 17



Stammering

Stammering, also known as stuttering, is a condition in which the sufferer speaks hesitantly or in a stumbling and jerky way. Stammering varies, both in the way it affects different people and in its severity. A speaker who stammers may find their fluency varies over time. Stammering can also be episodic. All of this is quite disconcerting for the stammerer, who can never be quite sure how much they will be affected in a given situation.

Young people don't usually grow out of stammering completely, but they can learn to manage it, with sensitive encouragement and professional support. The stammerer will suffer a great deal of anxiety, fear and embarrassment. They need people who are willing to listen patiently and not try to rush them.

As well as the more obvious sufferers, there will be those who seem either shy or reticent to take part in discussions or long-winded in the way they speak, hiding their stammer through pauses, hesitations and rephrasing. It will be hard to detect a stammerer in either of these cases.

Strangely enough, many children or adults who stammer noticeably in ordinary conversation appear to be stammer-free when they are able to take on a different role, such as acting or singing.

Key characteristics

The child who stammers may:

- prolong spoken sounds (eg 'ssssix')
- repeat particular sounds or beginnings of words (eg 'ta-ta-take')
- have long silences, when she is repeatedly unable to produce the required sound at all
- use hesitations and substitutions, such as 'you know' and 'er', to mask stammering
- play for time by asking the questioner to repeat herself
- deliberately avoid using particular words or sounds

- demonstrate physical signs of tension, such as blinking, grimacing, sighing, coughing, gulping, swallowing a lot, blushing or avoiding eye contact
- have low levels of confidence and self-esteem
- avoid responding to questions or participating in discussions whenever possible.

Support strategies

You may need to:

- slow down your own rate of speaking so as to reduce the pressure of time
- give the learner time to respond - do not interrupt, answer for them or try to finish their sentences
- reduce the number of questions you ask them
- encourage them to speak about their own interests as they will probably be able to do this with a greater degree of fluency
- try to find an alternative to the pupil having to speak in registration sessions
- support them as they learn to read by giving them opportunities to read in unison with another pupil or alone with an adult where others cannot hear
- provide the stammerer with a mentor to help alleviate some of their anxieties and frustrations
- create a relaxed and unhurried learning environment
- give lots of encouragement and praise to raise their confidence and self-esteem
- use eye-contact and an interested expression to emphasise your interest in them and in what she says, rather than how she says it
- do not assume a lack of interest in singing or drama, since these may be situations in which they can leave their stammer behind
- liaise closely with the speech and language therapist.

Support agencies

- British Stammering Association (BSA): www.stammering.org

If you have any particular items you would like information on or any interesting information or resources which you would like to share with your colleagues via this fortnightly bulletin please e-mail them to me:

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Many thanks

Anne