What to do if you think that your young child has a stammer

Remember to keep a file with all the details of your child's medical history, education reports and other important documents. You may need this information at some time and it should be kept in a safe place.

Take action yourself: two important steps to take.

1. Contact your local speech and language therapy service

   The BSA would advise a parent to seek advice from a therapist when they are concerned about a stammer, particularly if the child seems to be anxious. Ideally you should contact a therapist who specialises in stammering. You may ask the pre-school to complete the referral but, as this would involve staff considering whether to refer after going through the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, there would be a delay. It is best to avoid hold-ups when seeking the advice of a therapist as Early Intervention gives the best chance of recovery from stammering. Remember that this service is free to you as the National Health Service funds it. The BSA can provide you with the contact details of your local service.

2. Working in partnership with the pre-school staff

   Even when you have contacted a therapist yourself, it is advisable to keep the pre-school informed. When you do, you are likely to find that the staff will be guided in their response by the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (SEN Code).

   The Code is there to ensure that any child, who has a need for additional support, can be provided with this in a pre-school or school setting. It is therefore helpful for parents to talk about this with their pre-school. The BSA would always advise parents to discuss the SEN Code with staff as it is the means by which resources may be provided for a child. The SEN Code should ensure that the child's needs are monitored and planned for, and that parents and any other professionals involved, such as a speech and language therapist, are kept regularly informed about the child's progress.

   Talk frequently to your child's key worker and pass on any concerns you have, and respond to any concerns expressed by her. If your child is receiving therapy ask the therapist if she could go into the nursery or other setting, to give the staff information and, if appropriate, involve them in any programme of therapy being used.

   Ask the staff in the setting to use the BSA-Leaflets and Information about stammering for staff.

Do not worry that you are being a nuisance, or are over-reacting when you express your concern about your child's stammer, research does show that parents usually know their own child best and their concerns are legitimate. It is important that the pre-school and the therapist work with you to ensure that the stammer is not a barrier to learning for your child.

The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (SEN Code)
This will guide what will happen when you express your concern about your child’s speech in any nursery or other pre-school receiving funding from the government. If your child is placed with a childminder for example, then the SEN Code of Practice also applies, and the childminder will be part of a network, usually under the auspices of the local authority, that provides access to an advisor on special educational needs. You can get a copy of the SEN Code from the Department for Education (DFE). It explains how assessment and support will be made for your child and every educational setting must have a clear policy on this. **Often your pre-school will have a copy of this on display.**

**Gifted and talented children who stammer**

There is more understanding now of the need for pre-schools to identify children who are gifted and/or talented so many pre-schools will have a separate policy on this, or may include that policy within the general policy on special educational needs.

**Additional support**

The SEN Code outlines the stages by which your child can receive additional support according to his individual needs. It can be very helpful for a child who stammers and it is important that parents do express their concerns using the Code as a guide. Many parents do worry that if their child is supported by the SEN Code and placed on the pre-school SEN register, as having special educational needs, that this will label their child in a detrimental way. This is not the case at all, as the information is only available to the parents and the relevant professionals. Also the Code is intended to operate flexibly so that the child may be removed from the SEN register once his identified need has been met. The SEN Code is a helpful mechanism for making it clear that a child has identified needs that require additional support, usually temporarily for many children who stammer.

**Gifted and talented children who stammer**

Is your child who stammers gifted and/or talented?

There is more understanding now of the need for pre-schools to identify children who are gifted and/or talented so many pre-schools will have a separate policy on this, or may include that policy within the general policy on special educational needs. Additional support is required for these children to meet their individual needs. **Remember that a child who stammers has the same range of abilities as children who do not stammer, so is just as likely to be gifted and/or talented as they are.**

The Department for Education defines gifted and talented children as: 'Those who have one or more abilities developed to a level significantly ahead of their year group (or with the potential to develop these abilities)’. *Gifted* generally refers to the top five per cent of the school population in academic subjects and *talented* to the top five per cent in other subjects.

The term ‘gifted’ refers to a child who has a broad range of achievement at a very high level. Those children who are gifted often have very well developed learning skills. The term 'talented' refers to a child who excels in one or more specific fields, such as sport or music, but who does not perform at a high level across all areas of learning.

If your child has not been identified by the pre-school as gifted and/or talented and you think that he appears to be ahead of other children of his age, is quickly completing the work he is given at pre-school and appears bored for some of the time there, he may need more demanding learning activities. You should discuss this with your child's key worker, as staff have a responsibility to identify these children and provide for their needs.

**Information for parents**

National Association for Gifted Children UK (NAGC)
This is the main voluntary organisation providing information and support for parents of these children.

NAGC provides basic fact sheets on the aptitudes and behaviours that gifted and talented children may exhibit for parents to use to explore their understanding of their child's abilities. These are only intended to help parents consider the possibility that their child is gifted or talented and are in no way an accurate diagnosis of the abilities of an individual child. However, if you complete one they are a starting point for your discussion with the pre-school and will provide you with some evidence that you can use.

**What happens if your child is considered to be gifted and/or talented?**

The pre-school should now make some additional provision to encourage the development of your child's abilities and talents. Staff should also be able to advise you about interesting activities for you to arrange at home, and NAGC has local branches that can provide you with further information and support. Your local authority will also have an officer with some responsibility for these children's development and there may be programmes and activities available locally that your child will enjoy.

Parents and pre-school staff must balance challenging activities with continued support for the child's stammer however able he is, and ensure that he enjoys all activities without feeling stressed.

**How the SEN Code can help parents**

**How the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (SEN Code) can help parents**

If you have any worries at all about how your child's speech is affecting his progress at pre-school then you are entitled under the SEN Code to express these concerns and have a helpful response from the pre-school. There is considerable emphasis now on the speech, language and communication needs of children after the Bercow Report (2009) stressed the need for education staff to receive training in meeting these needs. The government accepted this report so staff in any pre-school now should be sensitive to any issues you raise about your child's speech and respond helpfully.

**The first step: Talking to your child's key worker about your concerns**

**You might want to ask the key worker:**

Does the pre-school notice that my child is stammering and does my child appear to be anxious about his speaking?

If so has this appeared to be affecting my child's learning in any way or is he at the same level as the other children of the same age?

Has my child appeared to be affected by his stammering in any other way?

1. Does he seem happy to talk in the class and at playtime with staff and other children?
2. Has his behaviour changed in any way?
3. Does the pre-school have Information about stammering for staff and are they using strategies to help?
4. The BSA has been told by some parents that the new curriculum has led staff in their pre-school setting to observe the children playing for assessments, and avoid talking directly with the children. These may be isolated concerns affecting a few parents of children who stammer, but you do need to bear this in mind and mention this to the key worker if you are worried that your child is not being encouraged to talk to staff, and his stammer is not being identified and supported.

If staff are able to give you reassurance that your child's learning is not being held back by his stammer, then you simply need to keep an eye on his progress and be ready to take further action if you are concerned again.

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Getting support for your child through the SEN Code

When you think that your child needs more support from the pre-school

Make another appointment to visit the pre-school

If you are still concerned after talking to your child's key worker then you should ask for another appointment within a week or so for a longer period of time. In a nursery specifically request that the member of staff responsible for Special Educational Needs (SENCO) is present, together with the colleague who spends the most time with your child. A childminder should ensure that the SENCO who works within that network of childminders is available.

Before this meeting ask for a copy of the pre-school’s special educational needs policy and of the records on your child’s progress. You are entitled to receive your child’s records within 40 days, so do not delay the appointment if you have not received them.

If you have already contacted a speech and language therapist as the BSA advises, explain at the meeting what is happening there and give her contact details if she is unable to come along.

At the meeting with the SENCO, what points can you make?

Remember that pre-school staff can only use strategies to support your child’s speech and help him access the curriculum. Only a speech and language therapist can work with the child to improve fluency.

At this meeting you need to explain why you think that your child needs more support than he has been receiving until now and discuss what options are available under the SEN Code.

Parent Partnerships can give you support

These are statutory services that offer impartial information, advice and support for parents of children and young people with special educational needs (SEN). If you think that you need to discuss your child’s needs before the meeting with a professional, you may contact this service in your area by telephone or at Parent Partnership. They will also be able to put parents in touch with other local organisations. If you are worried about going along on your own to meet the pre-school staff you can ask that one of their trained parent volunteers accompanies you to the meeting. If you choose to do this, then the volunteer will probably want to meet with you beforehand and will help you to prepare your point of view. If you prefer, you could ask a friend or relative to accompany you.

It is helpful to prepare for the meeting by observing your child’s speech and behaviour closely without appearing to be doing so and make short notes to take with you. You may wish to complete the fluency record from the end of this page.

Note the occasions when your child stammers and how he appears to feel about his speech, particularly whether he is frustrated and angry. Collect dates and times if you can of any recent episodes of severe stammering so that you can ask the key worker and the SENCO what had been taking place at pre-school on those days.

Give examples of how your child behaves at home and any changes you may have noticed in his speech during the time he has been attending pre-school.

Pass on any comments that your child has made about the pre-school and what is happening to him there. Explain what he has said about his stammer, how it makes him feel, and how staff and other children treat him. If you can provide them, exact examples of his experiences at pre-school that cause you concern would be helpful.

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Give your views on whether his stammer is now affecting his learning or behaviour in any way and enquire as to whether the staff are using the strategies to support him that you or the therapist have provided.

Mention any health or other problems in the family that you think may have affected your child, and if any one else in the family has similar problems with their speech.

Listen to the response from the pre-school staff and work out with them how your child can be helped. If they admit that they have not been using supportive strategies give details of the BSA-Leaflets and pass on Information about stammering for staff from this resource.

After this discussion you and the SENCO should be able to come to an agreement that your child needs the extra support. See What happens when the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice supports your child? in this resource.

Click on the following link to open a PDF, use the back button on your browser to return to this resource. To save the handout to your computer, right click and choose 'Save as'.

**Fluency Record**

This is a simple record of your child’s fluency, that gives a score of 1 to 10 where 10 is the highest rate of stammering and 1 the lowest. Give a score as the average for that day based on the episodes of stammering that you have heard. Place a cross in the box of your score for each day. If you think that the average on one day is 7, then place a cross in the box for that day at the score of 7.

**What happens when the SEN Code supports your child?**

**Differentiation**

The pre-school should listen to your concerns and explain how your child will be helped. The first step might be to use the routine differentiation. This simply means that some simple strategies such as those in the BSA-Leaflets and in Information about stammering for staff in this resource will be tried, and contact will be kept with you to see whether these are helping sufficiently. This may be called Wave 1 intervention. If the pre-school considers that this support is not sufficient staff may agree with you that more support be given, perhaps additional time for instance by your child’s key worker to talk with him. This may be called Wave 2 intervention, and will continue to be low key within the pre-school.

**Early Years Action**

If it seems that more help is needed, then the pre-school will discuss with you ways to give more support and ask to place your child on the first formal stage of support, 'Early Years Action'. He would then be placed on the special educational needs register. This can be very helpful for children who stammer as it ensures that your child's speaking needs are monitored and an effort made by all the staff to use good practice. Also it is likely to include an Individual Education Plan (IEP). The term used to explain this may be different but the plan will be discussed with you and give your child small steps to take in his speaking in pre-school and at home.

**Individual Education Plan will:**

- Set three or four small targets for your child, these should be simple and written like this 'by the end of term John will be able to' These steps should give small goals for your child's speaking: it could be talking about a toy to a member of staff, then moving on to talking at the same time as a 'buddy' in a class discussion, and moving on to talking independently. There might be a target for you to work on at home.
- Explain the ways of teaching to be used, for example there should be more opportunities for your child to have positive speaking opportunities, such as speaking in chorus with other children, or
answering questions with a conversation 'buddy'. Staff should be following good practice in their own speaking so that they are simplifying instructions, and pausing more frequently.

- Describe the help to be put in place, for example some one to one support from an adult in the setting.
- State when the plan is to be reviewed.
- Explain how the pre-school will decide if the help has been successful or whether it is no longer needed.

These targets should be talked about with you and your child regularly. After a term if they do not seem to be helping, your child should be assessed for the next stage below.

Early Years Action Plus

If there is already a therapist involved, because you have made a referral, and your child is receiving therapy, then the pre-school should have reviewed him for possible placement on 'Early Years Action Plus' already.

However, the BSA knows from parents that this has not always happened. It is advisable for the child to be placed on 'Early Years Action Plus' if therapy is in place, as support can be provided and monitored through the Individual Education Plan (IEP) to which the therapist can contribute. When the therapy has been completed then parents can discuss with the pre-school removing the child from this.

If your child is not receiving therapy and, after your discussion with the SENCO your child is considered for this referral, the pre-school may decide to do an assessment to see if in their view your child needs support from this outside agency. This assessment should collect information about your child’s speech from all the adults in the setting who have contact with your child. You should also contribute to this, and you may also want to pass on any observations from any other adults in the family who have regular contact with your child, such as grandparents.

If a referral is thought to be necessary, it will be made with your consent to a speech and language therapist. When this happens your child should be placed on 'Early Years Action Plus' and provided with an Individual Education Plan (IEP). The pre-school may be able to involve the therapist in planning the targets for your child’s IEP, and the therapist may also decide to involve staff in delivering therapy goals.

All this must be explained to you. If you have any questions at all, then it may be helpful to write them down for any meetings that you have with the pre-school and/or the therapist.

Reviewing the Individual Education Plan (IEP)

At 'Early Years Action' and 'Early Years Action Plus' IEPs should be reviewed at least three times a year. Ideally IEPs should be kept under continual review. If there is a problem the pre-school should not wait for a review before making changes. Staff should consult you as part of the review process and ask your views about your child’s progress. Reviews should not be too formal. Usually the pre-school would invite the therapist to contribute to the setting and review of targets for your child.

The review should look at:

- Progress made by your child
- Your views
- Your child's views
- The effectiveness of the IEP
- Issues affecting your child's progress
- Updated information and advice
- Future action - changes to targets, strategies
- Dealing with particular issues

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Your child's progress should be recorded on the IEP and new targets set.

However, if your child continues to stammer then it is always sensible to request that he remains on 'Early Years Action', even though he has been removed from 'Early Years Action Plus' as he is no longer receiving therapy.

While your views would always be taken into account the final decision on these matters rests with the pre-school and you would need to complain formally through the pre-school complaints procedure if you are dissatisfied. See in this resource When you have to make a formal complaint.

For the future

The BSA receives many enquiries from parents of pre-school children who are making an application to a primary school nursery or Reception class. Parents are often unaware that if they want to argue that their child's stammer makes him more likely to have his needs met in a particular school, which may be oversubscribed, they have to have evidence that his stammering has affected his learning in some way.

The best form of evidence of this is to have had your child placed on the special educational needs register at 'Early Years Action Plus' because he is or has been receiving therapy and has additional support in the pre-school. You should make a note of the dates of that placement and keep a brief note of the meetings that took place and the reviews of his IEP. Parents can then use this information as supporting the child's social and medical needs when making the application.

How the Equality Act can help your child who stammers

The Equality Act (EQA)

This does now apply to education providers. If a stammer is having a substantive effect on the child's ability to carry out normal tasks, of which communication is one, then it would apply to a child who stammers who was not communicating at the same level as other children of his age who did not stammer. In the pre-school this could include communicating his needs, speaking and listening activities in the class, performing in group or individual presentations.

Use the EQA to build your child's self-esteem

Children who stammer are most likely to be helped by the EQA when there is a suggestion that they are being excluded from activities in the pre-school as a result of their stammering. If a parent considered that this was actually happening or was planned, then it is important to mention this to the child's key worker. In many instances the BSA has found that a decision to exclude a child who stammers from an activity has not been thought through by staff. Often it is a well-intentioned, although misguided, attempt to protect the child from feeling anxious or getting embarrassed as staff would see it. However, to exclude a child in this way is discriminatory and a parent should politely make the point that if the task is adapted in some way the child could take part, as the EQA requires.

For example, if there was a Christmas performance planned and staff decided that your child could not take part, because he stammered too severely, this would be a definite example of discrimination against him as he could take part if they were to offer a more flexible approach. They could make an adaptation to allow him to participate with the other children, such as allowing him to take a role in the presentation where he spoke at the same time as at least one other child.

We know that children usually do not stammer when speaking at the same time as another person, so the experience of taking part in the performance could be managed to provide your child with a positive speaking experience in the same activity as the other children. This would be very helpful for your child's self-esteem.
Bring the requirements of the EQA to the attention of the staff if you think that it will help your child. If staff do not respond helpfully after you have discussed this with them then you can complain.

Further information

Stammering Law - This is a specialist web site on the law as it affects people who stammer.

When you have to make a formal complaint in this resource.

Further action: Assessment and Statementing

If your child receives 'Early Years Action Plus' help for a reasonable time without success, and the pre-school thinks that there is a serious cause for concern, the pre-school may ask for your consent to contact the local authority for a statutory assessment.

This will only happen if your child's stammer is part of more complex needs that should ideally have been identified at an earlier stage. The majority of children who stammer are unlikely to be statutorily assessed.

This assessment will take several months and will involve information about the child's needs from all the professionals involved, the parents and, if appropriate, the child. If the assessment concludes that your child needs more help, the local authority may produce a Statement of Special Educational Needs. The Department for Education (DFE) has encouraged local authorities to reduce the number of statements as the Inclusion Development Plan (IDP) is extending specialist provision in mainstream settings. If you do receive a statement this will give details of the help your child will be given and where they will go to pre-school. For example, a place in a specialist nursery to meet his needs might be offered. These are found throughout the country and many are run through the government's programme of Sure Start.

The SEN Code is clear that if your child at any stage appears to have serious difficulties the pre-school can proceed immediately to this statutory assessment. Parents should express their concerns as soon as possible so that support can be put in place. If you need advice about statementing your local Parent Partnership can give support. This is an organisation in every local authority area which provides independent advice to parents of children with special educational needs. See When your child has complex needs.

Summary

How to get support for learning for your pre-school child who stammers

Remember to keep a file with all the details of your child's medical history, education reports and other important documents. You may need this information at some time and it should be kept in a safe place.

What to do if you think that your young child has a stammer

Take action yourself: two important steps to take.

1. Contact your local speech and language therapy service

The BSA would advise a parent to seek advice from a therapist when they are concerned about a stammer, particularly if the child seems to be anxious. Do not delay seeking the advice of a therapist as Early Intervention gives the best chance of recovery from stammering. As parents may make this referral directly to most services, it is not worth waiting for the pre-school to decide to refer after going...
through the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice. Remember that this service is free to you as the National Health Service funds it. The BSA can provide you with the contact details of your local service.

**Stammering and more complex needs**

If your child is not attending a pre-school when you have a concern about his overall development as well as his stammer, you can also approach the Early Years team at your local authority. They will be able to provide you with information about the next step. See [When your child has complex needs](#).

2. **Working in partnership with the pre-school staff**

Even when you have contacted a therapist yourself, it is advisable to keep the pre-school informed. When you do, you are likely to find that the staff will be guided in their response by the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (SEN Code).

The Code is there to ensure that any child, who has a need for additional support, can be provided with this in a pre-school or school setting. It is therefore helpful for parents to talk about this with their pre-school. The BSA would always advise parents to discuss the SEN Code with staff as it is the means by which resources may be provided for a child. The SEN Code should ensure that the child's needs are monitored and planned for, and that parents and any other professionals involved, such as a speech and language therapist, are kept regularly informed about the child's progress.

Talk frequently to your child's key worker and pass on any concerns you have, and respond to any concerns expressed by her. If your child is receiving therapy ask the therapist if she could go into the nursery or other setting, to give the staff information and, if appropriate, involve them in any programme of therapy being used.

Ask the staff in the setting to use the BSA-Leaflets and Information about stammering for staff.

**Do not worry that you are being a nuisance, or are over-reacting when you express your concern about your child's stammer, research does show that parents usually know their own child best and their concerns are legitimate.** It is important that the pre-school and the therapist work with you to ensure that the stammer is not a barrier to learning for your child.

**What can the pre-school do to help your child**

Staff in the setting can work with you to discuss and support your child's needs through the processes available under the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice. There is provision for extra support in the setting, for example through 'Early Years Action'. If your child receives 'Early Years Action Plus' help for a reasonable time without success, and the pre-school thinks that there is a serious cause for concern, the pre-school may ask for your consent to contact the local authority for a statutory assessment.

This will only happen if your child's stammer is part of more complex needs that should ideally have been identified at an earlier stage. The majority of children who stammer are unlikely to be statutorily assessed. See [When your child has complex needs](#).