What to do if you think that your 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.

When your child is receiving therapy and was placed on 'Early Years Action' or 'Early Years Action Plus' then the pre-school will have passed on the details when your child transferred. This should be the starting point for your discussion about support for your child's stammer with the class teacher.

What to do if you think that your 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. Ideally you should contact a therapist who specialises in stammering. You may ask the 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 delay when seeking the advice of a therapist as Early Intervention gives the best chance of recovery from stammering as late as 7 years in some cases. Older children can be helped by therapy to manage their speech and maintain their confidence, so that their progress in school is not held back. 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

When your child has complex needs

Most children who stammer do not have other complex needs but if your child appears to have significant difficulties you should raise your concerns with the class teacher, and ask for an assessment.

2. Working in partnership with school staff

Even when you have contacted a therapist yourself, it is advisable to keep the 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 the class teacher. 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.

Keep in regular contact with the school

Talk frequently to your child's teacher and pass on any concerns you have, and respond to any concerns expressed by her. It is very helpful if your child has one colleague, perhaps the teacher or the teaching assistant, who will regularly talk with your child, particularly when he is settling in. After that your child should feel able to approach that colleague when he has a worry. This colleague should also be the key contact in the school for both you and the therapist.

If your child is receiving therapy ask the therapist if she could go into the school to give the staff

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information and, if appropriate, involve the member of staff who works with your child in any programme of therapy being used.

Ask the teacher to access BSA:Education the online training resource for school 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 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 primary school receiving funding from the government. If your child goes to an independent school it is likely that these guidelines do influence their practice too, although of course that is a matter for the school to decide. The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (SEN Code) explains how assessment and support will be made for your child and every government funded educational setting must have a clear policy on this. You can always request a copy of the school policy on special educational needs for your own use. Often your primary school will have a copy of this on display.

Gifted and talented children

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

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 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. The Code is also 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 schools to identify children who are gifted and/or talented so many 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 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 in the class and appears bored for some of the time there, he may need more demanding learning activities. You should discuss this with your child's teacher, 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 teacher 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 class teacher 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 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 school then you are entitled under the SEN Code to express these concerns to the class teacher and have a helpful response from her. 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 should be sensitive to any issues you raise about your child's speech and respond supportively.

The first step: Talking to your child's teacher about your concerns

You might want to ask:

- Do you notice that my child is stammering and does he 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 teacher have Information about stammering for staff and are they using strategies...
to help?

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

Getting support for your child through the SEN Code

When you think that your child needs more support in school

Make another appointment to visit the school

If you are still worried, or develop another concern, after talking to your child's teacher then you should ask for another appointment within a week or so for a longer period of time. You should specifically request that the member of staff responsible for Special Educational Needs (SENCO) is present, together with the class teacher.

Before this meeting ask for a copy of the 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 and the teacher, what points can you make?

Remember that 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 and may offer staff guidance on achieving fluency goals.

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 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 teacher and the SENCO what had been taking place in 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 in that class.
Pass on any relevant comments that your child has made about the 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 school that cause you concern would be helpful.

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 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 BSA:Education 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.

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.

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

What happens when the SEN Code supports your child?

Differentiation

The class teacher and the SENCO should have listened to your concerns and explained 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 teacher 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 teacher or a teaching assistant to talk with him. This may be called Wave 2 intervention, and will continue to be low key within the school. The BSA knows that one-to-one support for a time can be very helpful for a child who stammers at any age, and when that has finished the child should still feel that he could approach that colleague whenever he has a worry.

School Action

If it seems that more help is needed, then the teacher will discuss with you ways to give more support and ask to place your child on the first formal stage of support ‘School 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 class and at home.

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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 teacher 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.

School Action Plus

If there is already a therapist involved, because you have made a referral, and your child is receiving therapy, then the school should have reviewed him for possible placement on 'School 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 School 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 teacher 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 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 staff in the school 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 'School Action Plus' and provided with an Individual Education Plan (IEP). The 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 school and/or the therapist.

Reviewing the Individual Education Plan (IEP)

At 'School Action' and 'School Action Plus' IEPs should be reviewed at least three times a year by the class teacher and/or the SENCO. Ideally IEPs should be kept under continual review. If there is a problem the SENCO 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 school would invite you and 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
- Any need for more information on your child etc.

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

At some point the teacher might advise that your child no longer needs the support of 'School Action Plus' as therapy has been completed and your child is no longer stammering, or is managing his speech successfully so that it does not hinder his progress. There should be a meeting when this decision is explained to you and you can express your views. If you are happy with that decision then the additional support may cease and your child will be monitored in the normal way. If however, you feel that some additional support for his speech within the class would still be helpful you could request that he remains on 'School Action' until it seems appropriate to remove him from that.

While your views would always be taken into account the final decision on these matters rests with the school and you would need to complain formally through the 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 primary school children who are making an application to a secondary school. 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 some time at 'School Action Plus' because he is or has been receiving therapy and has had additional support in the primary 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 to secondary school.

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 primary 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 school activities 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 class teacher. 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 'School Action Plus' help for a reasonable time without success, and the school
thinks that there is a very serious cause for concern, the SENCO 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 DCSF 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 he will receive this help. It
could be in his present school, or a specialist class unit or special school place may be offered to meet
his needs.

The SEN Code is clear that if your child at any stage appears to have serious difficulties the 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 help. This is an organisation in every local authority area that 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 primary school child who stammers

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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.

When your child is receiving therapy and was placed on 'Early Years Action' or 'Early Years Action Plus' then the pre-school will have passed on the details when your child transferred. This should be the starting point for your discussion about support for your child's stammer with the class teacher.

What to do if you think that your 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 whenever you notice he is stammering. Early Intervention gives the best chance of recovery from stammering, sometimes as late as 7 years. Older children can be helped by therapy to manage their speech and maintain their confidence so that their progress in school is not held back. As parents may make this referral directly to most services, it is not always worth waiting for the 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.

2. Working in partnership with school staff

Even when you have contacted a therapist yourself, it is advisable to keep the 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 the 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 class teacher 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 school to give the staff information and, if appropriate, involve them in any programme of therapy being used.

Ask the class teacher to access BSA:Education for online training.

What can the school do to help your child?

Staff 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 school for example through School Action.

When your child has complex needs

Most children who stammer do not have other complex needs but if your child appears to have significant difficulties you should raise your concerns with the class teacher, and ask for an assessment.