

Core messages for primary school staff to support a child who stammers

When a child appears to be stammering always advise the parent that a referral should be made to a speech and language therapist for advice. Early Intervention at the pre-school age gives the best chance of recovery from stammering up to about 7 years of age. After that recovery is less likely but therapy will help the child to manage his speech so that he is not held back at school. Most services work in partnership with the school

Give the child time to finish, and do not interrupt or finish off words.

Listen attentively, and echo back some content so that the child feels that what he said is more important than how he said it.

Maintain normal eye contact and avoid showing impatience, such as by frequently nodding, or getting on with another task.

Slow your own speech with natural pauses, signalling that there is no need to rush.

Allow the child to make one word answers when he is obviously having a day when the stammer is severe. He also may enjoy talking in unison with another child when saying a rhyme or similar, as he is less likely to stammer when talking in chorus.

If the child is struggling to speak, acknowledge the effort he is making with a kind comment, 'You did really well there to say that word'.

Judge when the child seems to want to talk about his speech and offer the chance to do so in a one-to-one situation.

Notice when the child appears to be communicating some need for support through his behaviour. He may feel worried about his speech without being able to express that anxiety directly and his behaviour may change as a result of his worry.

Carefully monitor for any teasing or bullying and respond effectively.