

Top Tips for Helping a Young Child who Stammers

Have 1-to-1 time to just play

Many children stammer less when playing – possibly because there is less pressure or demand within play, and your child is free to say whatever s/he wants to, whenever s/he wants to. Let your child choose the activity, and just follow his/her lead. Playing with siblings is important, but ensure that the child who stammers is able to take part fairly and given time to take their turn when talking.

Keep the conversation relaxed, unhurried and unpressured

Many children stammer more when excited or when trying to tell you something in a hurry. Some ways to achieve more relaxed and unhurried conversations are:

⇒ **Slow down your own talking slightly** – many parents say that if only their child would slow down, s/he wouldn't stammer as much. It is far more effective for you to slow yourself down and your child will naturally copy your pace.



⇒ **Use more pauses in your talking** - this lets your child know that there is no rush, it is OK to pause while thinking about what you want to say, and it gives 'thinking time' - to think of the words s/he wants to say, to put them in the right order, and then say them with the right sounds. This is usually more effective than asking your child to stop, start again or take a breath.

⇒ **Try to use fairly short, simple sentences** - even if you know your child is able to understand more use short simple sentences while s/he is going through a period of stammering. You can also try using comments rather than questions in order to reduce the pressure on the child – for example, rather than asking what s/he did at school, tell them about your day – many children respond to this by telling you what they did too.

Establish a good bedtime routine. Some children will stammer more when tired. Young children generally need 11-12 hours of sleep each night.

Give specific praise. For example "you let your brother take a turn, that was very kind" - this will help build their confidence. Remember it's what they say that's important, not how they say it.

Be aware of teasing. Negative comments can be hurtful and may affect the child's confidence. These may be from strangers or family and friends.