

Stammering in Preschool Children

It is fairly common for children to develop a stammer between the ages of 3 and 5 years old. This is likely to be due to the burst of language learning that usually takes place at this age.

Research tells us that $\frac{3}{4}$ of these children will stop stammering as their language and speech systems develop, though a minority will continue to stammer into later childhood and beyond. Persistent stammering is not caused by nerves. It is mainly neurological and often hereditary.

All of these children who stammer will benefit from the adults around them adapting their interactions to reduce the external demands on them whilst they are trying to master conversation.

In your Early Years settings it is helpful to be aware of some common external demands which may lead to more stammering.

Time pressure

Children may feel rushed and try to speak quickly in a busy environment.

You can help by:

Slowing down *your own* rate of speaking, and leaving short pauses before answering. This helps to slow down the whole interaction. Avoid asking a child to slow down or take a breath, as this can lead to more anxiety in the long run.

Turn-taking

it is difficult to break into a conversation if you stammer, and it is common to be interrupted as it can take a long time to say something.

You can help by:

having clear rules in your setting for listening to each other and waiting for your turn. Praise children for good waiting. This will help all children, and particularly a child who is stammering.



Answering questions

A question demands a response and this extra pressure can lead to more stammering. Often when we ask questions, we ask another one before a child has answered to keep the conversation going, and this can also increase the pressure and expectation.

You can help by:

Making more comments so children can choose whether to join in or not. A useful rule is the 5 finger rule – a ratio of 4 comments to one question. When you do ask a question, being down at a child's level and waiting for a response signals that they have time to think.

If you are wondering how to support a child's stammering, please talk to their families about making a referral to the NELFT stammering team:

** Referral to the service can be found [here](#) using the WF Specialist Children's Services Referral Form

We accept referrals if there is any parental concern about their child's stammering.

For more information you can share this link with parents:

[What is stammering and how can I help my child with their stammer? - BBC Tiny Happy People](#)