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Specialist Speech and Language Therapy Service

Willy Russell Centre for Children and Adults who Stammer

**How to support the child or young person who stammers**

Advice for school staff

**Adapting the communicative environment:**

**Listen patiently and calmly when the child is speaking**, without interrupting them or finishing their sentences. Keep natural eye contact, especially during moments of stammering.

When they have finished talking, it may be helpful to repeat back some of what they have said, as this may help them to feel that you have listened to them and value their contribution.

**Reinforce conversational turn-taking rules with the class**. Knowing that they will be listened to, without being interrupted, can help a child who stammers to feel more confident about speaking. It is also important that the child who stammers understands and follows the same turn-taking rules as others.

**Slow your own speech down and use more pauses**. This is the best way to help the child to feel unhurried. Don’t make suggestions such as ‘slow down’, ‘take a breath’, or ‘think about what you’re saying’. These will not help and may make talking more difficult.

**Reduce the number of direct questions that you ask**. Too many questions, especially open questions that require more complex answers, can be difficult for a child who stammers. Simplify questions, where possible, by providing choices. For example, change an open question, such as, ‘What is the story about?’ to one that’s easier to answer, e.g., ‘Is the story about a lost dog or a holiday?’ Also consider using comments instead of questions. For example, rather than asking ‘What have you drawn?’, you could say ‘That’s a lovely picture!’ and wait to see if they respond.

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**Reducing the impact of stammering:**

**If the child does not seem to be aware that they are stammering, do not draw attention to it**. If they are aware, they may appear concerned or frustrated, comment on their speech, or stop talking part-way through a sentence. If this happens when the child is alone with you or with a group of supportive students, it may help to acknowledge the situation and reassure them. Respond in the same way as you would with anything else that they find difficult, i.e., be calm, matter-of-fact, and reassuring. For example, say something like ‘You got a bit stuck there, but it’s okay, I’m still listening’ or ‘I could see that word was a bit bumpy/stuck, but it’s okay, you said what you wanted to say’.

**It may be helpful to check whether the child finds any activities in school particularly difficult** and, if they do, find a solution together. Examples of adjustments could include raising hands for registration instead of answering verbally, or reading aloud with another child rather than alone. Discuss this in a relaxed way, using neutral language about stammering, e.g., refer to it as a different way of talking, rather than a ‘problem’; talk about stammering more/less or finding talking easy/difficult, rather than good/bad days. It is better to involve the whole class in any changes, rather than singling out the child who stammers. Reasonable adjustments for older students undertaking oral exams could include being given extra time or incorporating a written element into the assessment.

**Build communicative confidence by giving praise for good communication (not related to stammering)**. Point out what you noticed, and what was good about it, e.g. ‘You explained that very well’.

**If other children respond negatively to the child’s stammering, help them to understand how to listen well and respond appropriately**. When completing whole class activities which promote diversity, consider including stammering and other communication differences in the discussion.

**Ensure that all staff, including lunchtime staff, are aware of the child’s stammering and the best ways to help**.

This leaflet only gives general information. Do not rely on this leaflet alone for information about a child’s therapy. Please contact the Specialist Speech and Language Therapy service at the Willy Russell Centre if you would like to discuss anything. If you are based in Sefton, please contact your local Speech and Language Therapy service.

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Further information can also be found at:

<https://stamma.org/resources/professionals/teachers>

This information can be made available in other languages and formats if requested:

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