

Has your little one developed a stammer?



It's normal for little ones to repeat words and phrases, and to hesitate as they work out what they want to say – this isn't usually stammering. **When children know what they want to say but the words aren't coming out, this is more likely to be stammering.** Stammering can start gradually (over a few weeks) or suddenly (overnight), and can come and go for days or weeks at a time.

1 in 12 children experience stammering during their preschool years.



When children are stammering, they might repeat words or parts of words: **"and-and-and it works"** or **"be-be-because I want to"**. They might stretch out sounds: **"I like ssspiderman"** or get stuck on a sound while nothing comes out: **"I want a... banana"**. You might notice your little one trying to force words out or giving up on what they were trying to say.

Why is my child stammering?

Learning to talk is complex and your little one isn't stammering because of anything you've done or not done. Young children stammer when their speech system isn't able to cope with demands placed on it – not because they are nervous.

These demands could come from your little one having lots to say and being excited, upset, rushed, or tired. They could come from other people – for example, asking your little one lots of questions or using language that is too complex.

Should I be worried?

Most children will stop stammering as they get older, and it's important to remember that it's okay to stammer. If your child has recently started to stammer, and they don't seem to be aware or bothered by it, then you probably don't need to be worried. If your little one has been stammering for a few months and you are concerned, you can speak to your Health Visitor, your local speech and language therapy service, or [STAMMA](#).

How can I help them?

How you respond to your little one when they stammer can make a big difference. You can give your little one the time they need by waiting for them to get their words out. Try to avoid rushing them or finishing their words.

- Slow down your rate of speech but don't tell your little one to "slow down", "take your time" or "take a deep breath".
- Follow your little one's lead when you are chatting. Talk about what they are interested in and respond to what they say and do.
- Make a comment and wait or ask one question at a time. Give them plenty of time to answer.
- Pause before answering your little one's questions. This shows them that it is okay to take time to think.
- Show them you are interested in what they are saying, not how they are saying it. Look at them when they talk to show you are listening.
- Talk openly and reassuringly with your little one about their stammer. You could say: "Some words are hard to get out. It's okay, I'm listening".
- Make sure everyone gets a turn in conversations.
- Spend five minutes a day having calm, uninterrupted, one on one time with your child.

Stammering often runs in families – about 60% of people who stammer have another family member who also stammers.

Bilingualism doesn't cause stammering.

Find further information

STAMMA

Action for Stammering Children

Michael Palin Centre for Stammering

Top tips from the MPC (Michael Palin Centre for Stammering)