

TALK Stammering

Guidance for Early Years Professionals



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Introduction

Communication is an essential foundation skill.
It supports other areas of development

Life and
Employment
Skills

Future Life
Opportunities

Social
Development
Independence

Social
Development
Relationships

Emotional
Health and
Wellbeing

Social
Development
Behaviour

Learning and
Literacy

Communication



Communication is Essential

Understanding	Listening & Hearing	Talking Speech sounds Words Sentences
Non Verbal Skills Facial expressions Eye contact	ALL of these are very important. Without one, communication will be significantly less effective	Memory Auditory Visual
Social Skills Turn taking Staying on topic	Physical Ability Gesture/signs Body language	Motivation Interaction

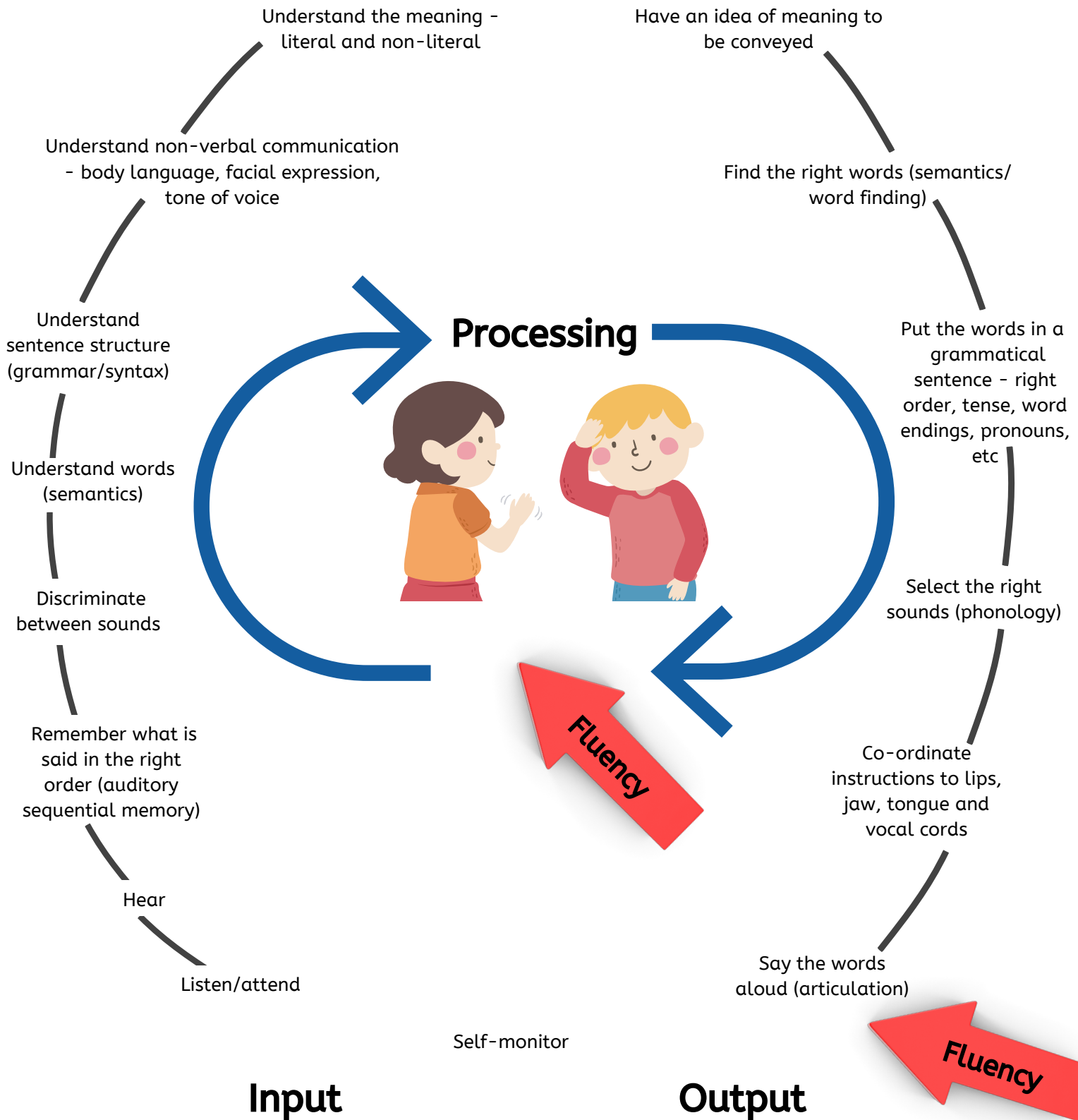
Language is made up of a number of components as seen in the table above.

These elements work together so that we can understand and produce language.

The components are interdependent – each bit needs to work in order for the whole system to function effectively.



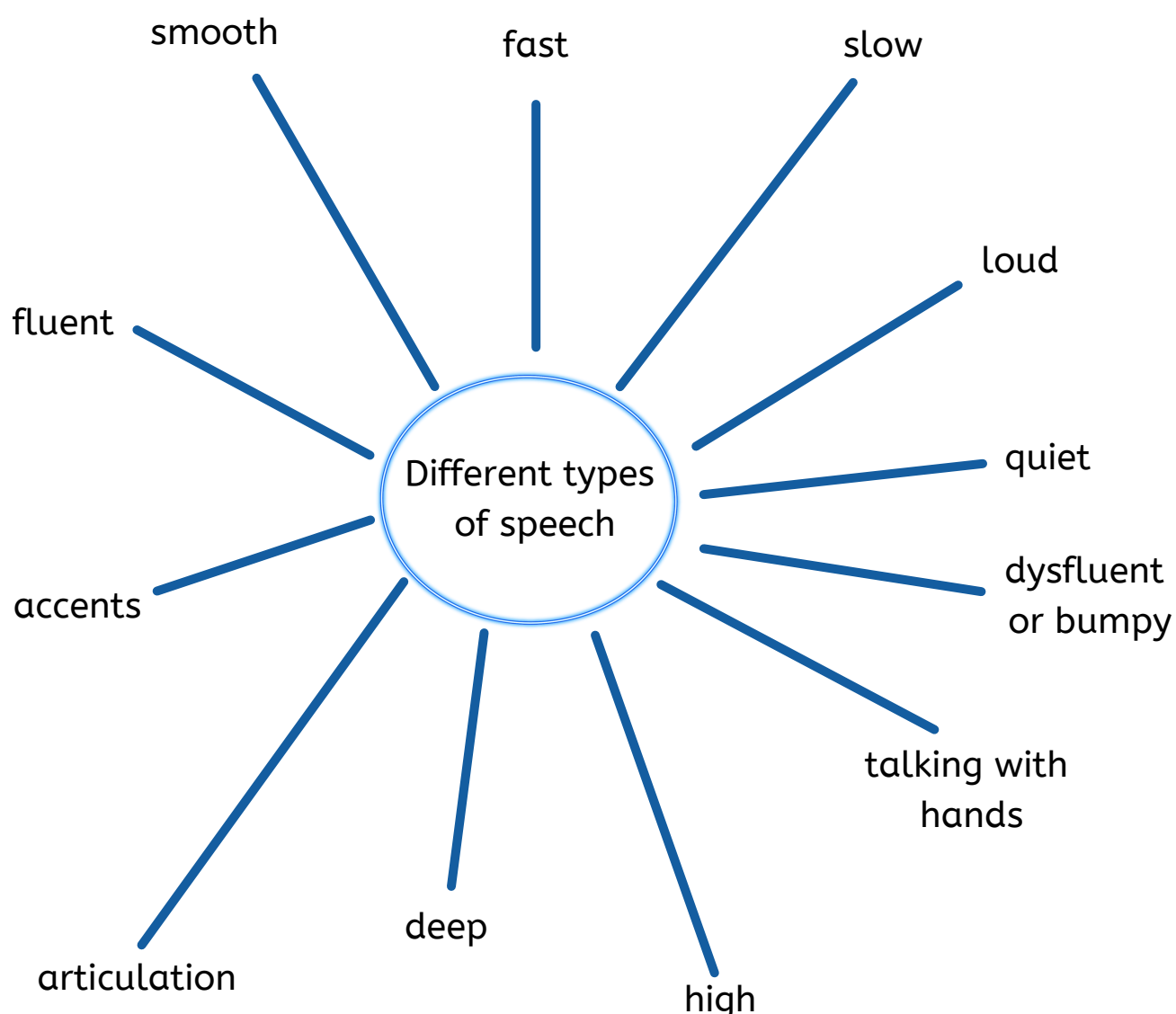
The Communication Chain



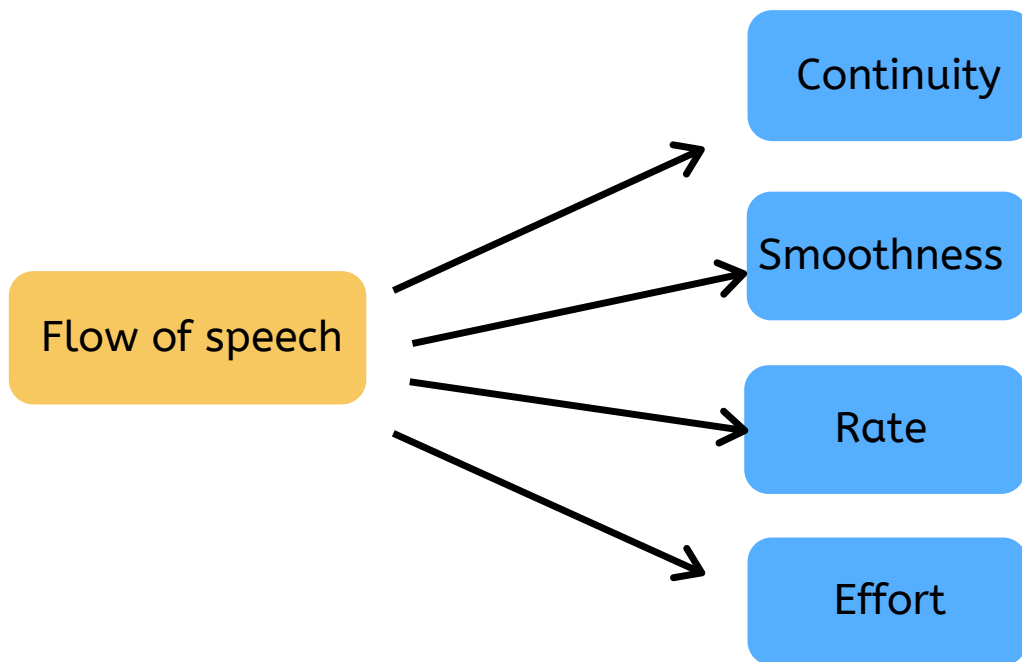
The Communication chain shows how many steps and processes that are involved in talking. It is an incredibly complex process, completed in split second timing. Communication can break down at any point, resulting in a speech and language difficulty, such as stammering.

Speech is a complex, fast process that shapes and releases a stream of exhaled air through the movement of muscles of the throat, tongue, palate and lips. Our vocal folds also need to vibrate for some sounds.

We all speak differently, dysfluency is a communication difference.



What is Fluency?



Dysfluency

What is dysfluency?

- Disruptions to the flow of speech
- Interjections – uhhh umm like
- Pauses
- Hesitations
- Repeating full words'

We are all dysfluent from time to time

These are called 'normal dysfluencies'

Mummy look,
Mummy look,
Mummy look over there!

Well uhh -
yeah...umm...

..... we could
we could like....

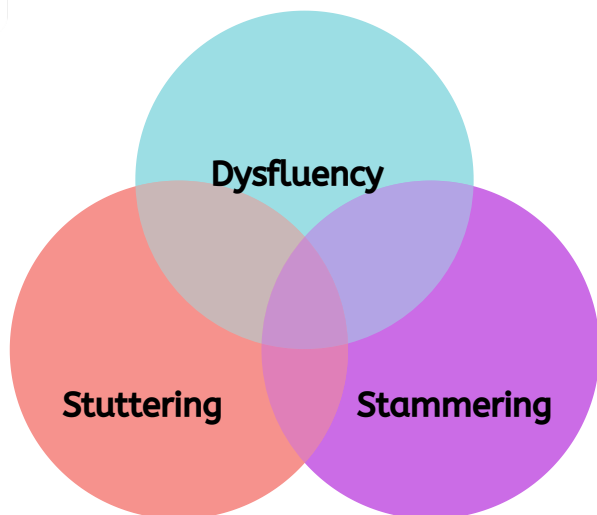


Communication is a vital foundation skill to develop in the early years.

It is a complex system of interacting components and sometimes it can breakdown: this may result in dysfluent speech.

We all communicate in our own way and have different styles to each other: lots of well known people stammer, this is their communication difference.

What We Know



All of these words are used to describe speech in which the typical flow and fluency is interrupted - they all mean the same thing!

Around 1% of adults in the world have a stammer

The BSA reported that 3% of adults in the UK have a stammer

8% of children will experience stammering in childhood

Between 75% and 80% of those who stammer in early childhood 'grow out of it'

Most children start stammering between the ages of 2-5 but it can start up to the age of 12 years

"Acquired stammering" is far less common and starts later in life.

60% of people who stammer have a close relative who also stammers.

We call it '**developmental stammering**' when young children start to stammer when they're learning to speak

Stammering is 3 to 4 times more common in boys

Can stammering run in families?

Yes. 60% of people who stammer have a close relative who also stammers.

Is there a gender difference?

Yes. Stammering is 3 to 4 times more common in boys

Do stammers always present the same in a person?

No. Stammering for one person can vary from one day, hour, sentence or event. It can also be a very sudden onset or can come along gradually.

Do parents cause their children to stammer?

No. But we do know that some adult interaction behaviours help to support fluent speech more than others.

Can you pick it up from others?

No. Stammering cannot be caught or learnt from another person – stammering is not a disease or a learnt habitual behaviour.

What causes stammering?

Stammering is highly complicated and research continues today to find out more. There is now growing evidence from brain research that people who stutter have a deficit in the neural processing underpinning spoken language. The precise nature of this neural processing problem is as yet unclear.

Are stammerers just more nervous?

This is a popular misconception. It is often assumed that people who stammer are shy or nervous. In actual fact, this is not true.

Stammering can affect a person's confidence and self-esteem. In some speaking situations it is harder to be fluent and as a result the individual may seem to be more reserved. Shyness or nervousness are most likely to be the result of the stammer – not the other way round.

It is worth bearing in mind that it is clear that the more anxious ANY speaker is, the less fluent they become.



Key Message

Lots of children experience a period of dysfluency in the early years
– many children will become fluent themselves as they mature

We don't know why children stammer but it often runs in families
– there is a genetic link

Children don't learn to stammer by copying another person – it's
not catching!

Stages of Dysfluency

Early Stage

- Child is unaware/ unconcerned.
- Mild dysfluencies – lacking tension or struggle.
- Does not avoid words or situations.

Borderline

- Child has some awareness/ concern, usually when stammering.
- Stammers may be tense, hurried.
- May be prolongations or blocks as well as repetitions of phrases and sounds.
- May occasionally avoid words or situations.

Confirmed

- Child is aware and may think about stammering a lot of the time.
- Stammers may be very tense, and last several seconds – or may be hidden so that there is less actual stammering and the symptoms may 'go underground' affecting behaviour.
- May avoid a great deal – change words, avoid situations e.g. the phone, groups



Always discuss your concerns with parents/carers and refer to Speech and Language Therapy at the **EARLIEST** possible time – do not wait until the borderline or confirmed stages are present

Typical Dysfluency in the Early Years

Multi-syllable
WHOLE - word
repetitions

"mummy mummy
mummy"

Whole phrases
repetitions

"I want a, I want
a, I want a"

Revisions

"it's a bird, it's a
plane"

Features of Later Stammering

Reactions

- Blocks
- Prolongations
- Sound or syllable repetitions

These are instinctive responses to a breakdown in the execution of speech sounds and typically come alongside tension, and struggle behaviours

Other acquired reactions from people who stammer may include....

Changing words

Giving up
speaking

Stamping their
foot

Tapping hand

Holding breath
while speaking

Tension signs in
the face around
the eyes, lips
and neck

Crying

Laughing

Further Potential Behaviours

Anticipate speaking situations and plan for them

Saying very little

Arrive late to avoid introducing themselves

Avoid talking on the phone

Avoid jobs that involves a lot of speaking



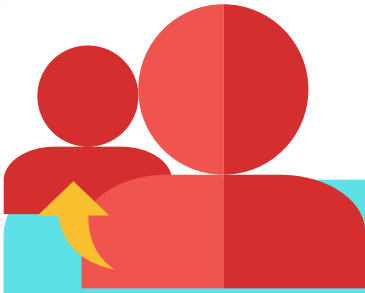
Key Message

Many children go through a typical developmental stage of normal non fluency – they are often completely unaware of this.

For some children this may become a longer term persistent stammer over time.

Some children who stammer may develop other tension behaviours alongside their stammer – whilst this is more unusual in the Early Years, you may see this at times.

Referrals



- Early intervention with young children is found to be most effective.
- The young child's brain is still wiring and therefore more able to change
- In the early years most children are unaware that they are having any difficulty – this is good! However you should refer them anyway
- Therapy for older children and teenagers aims to reduce the impact of the stammer on the person's life by helping them to find strategies to control the stammering, by building their confidence and by helping them to manage their thoughts and feelings about their stammer.



Not intervening early heightens the risk of a longer term persistent stammer developing



The Stammering Iceberg

“Stuttering is like an iceberg, with only a small part above the waterline and a much bigger part below”

Dr Joseph Sheehan

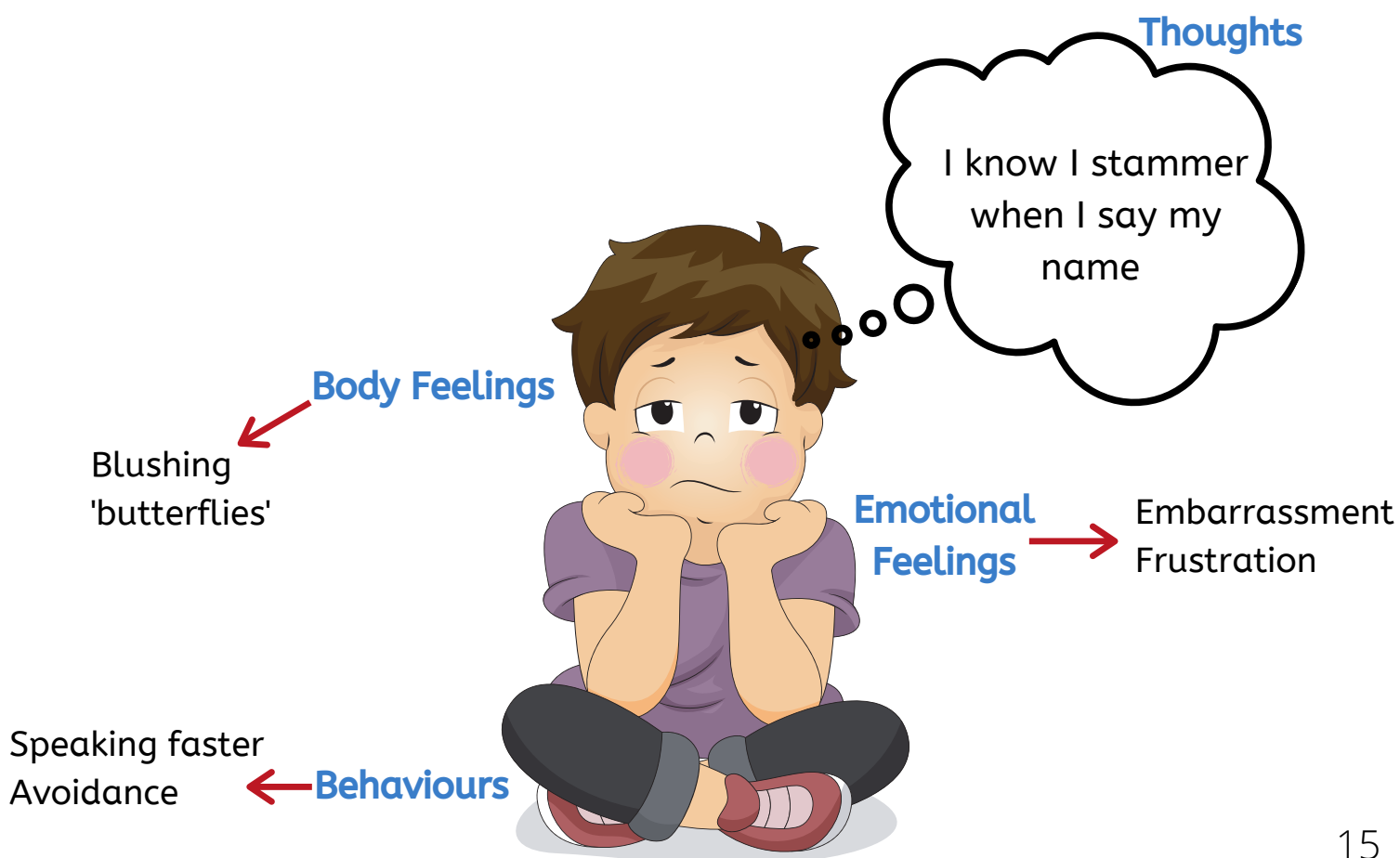
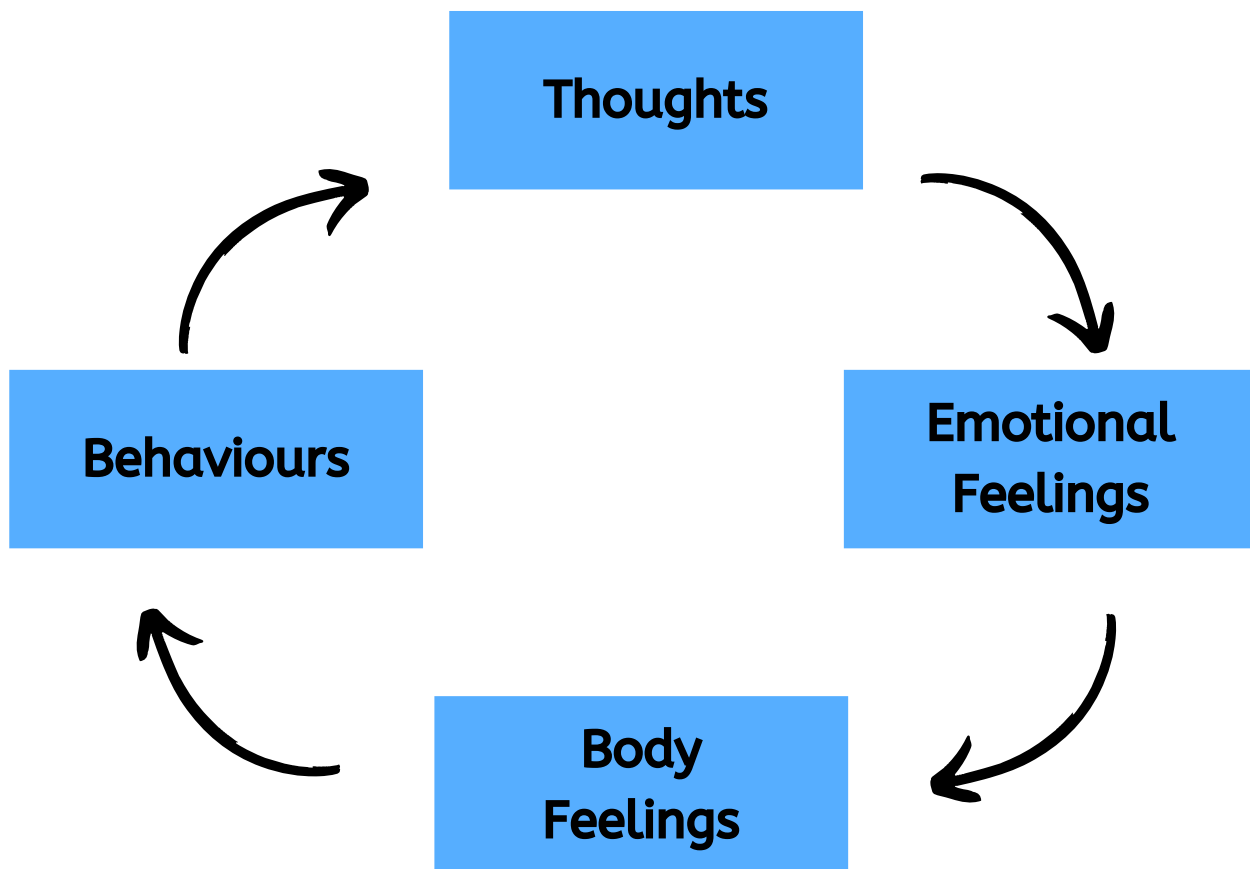
Prolongations,
repetitions, blocks
(what we see and
hear)

Fear, denial,
shame, anxiety,
isolation, guilt, and
hopelessness (what
might be going on
under the surface)



- Sheehan observed that stuttering was typically more disruptive to a person's emotional wellbeing than it was to their actual speech.
- What is below the surface level is not the cause of a person's stuttering.
- Some people may have a lot of ice above but not very much ice below, and vice versa.
- The experience of stammering is different for everyone, but there are general patterns that are present for most – fear of the moment of stuttering, avoiding speaking situations, embarrassment, guilt, hopelessness, shame.
- These thought patterns can make what is happening on the surface more exaggerated.

Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviours



Risk Factors for a Persistent Stammer



Boys are at higher risk for persistence of stuttering than girls



Family history of persistent stuttering



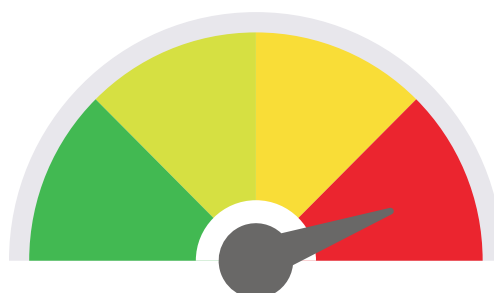
Duration of onset greater than 6 to 12 months or no improvement over several months.



Co-occurring speech and language impairment.



Age of onset: children who start stuttering at age 3½ or later



increased risk

Covert Stammering



- Hidden
- High levels of fluency
- High levels of avoidance, for example changing words or saying less
- Strong negative feelings about stammering



Someone with an interiorised stammer will often:

- hide the fact that they stammer
- worry that people will find out they stammer
- have few people in their life that know they stammer
- feel ashamed of their 'secret' stammer
- search ahead in their mind for potentially difficult sounds
- substitute feared words for others that are easier to say
- use complex avoidance strategies to hide their stammer

All this avoidance is really HARD WORK and can be emotionally and physically exhausting

Co-occurring Language Difficulties

Children who stammer may also have another speech and language need that may impact on their fluency. For example.....

- Difficulties understanding
- Limited vocabulary
- Difficulties using sentences/speech sounds
- Word finding problems
- It is important to establish if there are also underlying language issues and work on them to support fluency

Remember to use your Wellcomm even though the parent may only be focusing on the stammer. It is very helpful to know if there are any underlying or co-existing language needs that need addressing.



"Stammering is not the issue but how we respond to it is"

Everard, 2017

Most children in the early years are unaware that they are stammering or having any difficulty with talking

The main aim of intervention is therefore to try and maintain this level of awareness so that children don't start to get worried about talking

This is mainly done by managing the communication environment

Key Message



Early education about stammering is vital to prevent negative attitudes and behaviours towards stammering affecting children's confidence and participation

If we intervene early we can make a difference to the fluency but more importantly reduce the risk of negative thoughts and feelings affecting long term well being

Always refer children who are stammering for specialist speech and language support

Thinking about the dialogue we choose

Unhelpful

“she can’t speak properly”

“his stammer is really bad”

“they’ll grow out of it”

“he will overcome it”

Helpful

“she stammers when she talks”

“sometimes their words get stuck”

“he prolongs the first sounds often and this frustrates him”

“most children who stammer will stop stammering”

“accept”

“embrace”

Why

‘bad’ and ‘cant speak properly’ hold many negative connotations. Instead be objective and describe the behaviours or feelings that you see in a non judgmental way.

‘grow out of it’ suggests the child has failed to develop properly. Implies that stammering is a negative behaviour.

‘he will overcome it’ implies that stammering is an enemy that can be beaten if enough effort is applied

How to Interact



DO

React to a child's stammer as 'normally' as possible – try to not look anxious

Listen to what they have to say – be interested, and give NORMAL eye contact (no staring!)

Be patient – give them time to finish

Think about your own speech – do you need to slow down?

Ask one question at a time, and give time to reply

Keep your own language simple



DON'T

Don't finish their sentence for them

Don't tell them to hurry up

Don't tell them to stop, slow down, start again or have another go

Don't tell them to take a breath

All of these things may feel helpful – but they just draw attention to the talking and lead the child to think that something is actually going wrong with their talking. This is counter productive

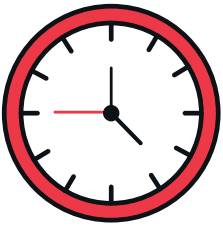
Strategies

Establish a calm environment		
Make calm and relaxed talking standard practice	Encourage everyone to contribute	Allow a range of responses to questions e.g. can put up hand to answer the register
Opportunities for speaking aloud in unison with another	Establish good turn taking in talking environments	Always give praise for doing something well to increase self-esteem in general

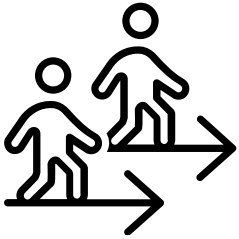
Top Tips

- 1 Be a good communication model, speak slowly and clearly
- 2 Inform all of the other adults about the approaches you are taking so everyone is doing the same - consistency
- 3 Think about the child's overall wellbeing - can they keep their favourite toy with them, just for now?
- 4 SLOW DOWN - not just your speech rate, also your actions
- 5 Repeat back what the child has said the way they would have said it if they could

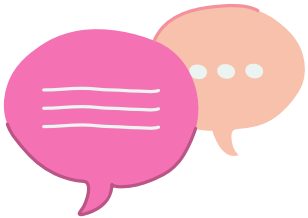
More Top Tips



You won't always be able to wait and listen so be realistic: "I can't listen to you right now but I will when....." (be specific)



Don't make the child with a stammer wait too long for their turn in conversations and games, be fair about taking turns, but be realistic about how long is ok to wait



Focus on WHAT they are saying rather than HOW they are saying it



Praise the good stuff: 'I love it when you tell me about your dog, you use great words'



Child is Showing Concern

- Children are affected in different ways.
- Some are not very concerned, while others can be very aware of a difficulty with their talking and get cross or upset.
- Some may show signs of struggling with their words and frustration with their inability to say what they want to say and give up/ walk away.
- For some children, a seemingly insignificant stammer can have a big impact on their lifestyle, while for others an apparently marked level of stammering doesn't seem to hold them back in the least.



The amount of stammering that the child is experiencing is not necessarily linked to their level of awareness or concern about it.

If a child is showing awareness/ concern

Always discuss with parent/carer first, share experiences. Don't ignore it if the child is aware, or they might think they are not allowed to talk about their speech. Try these phrases:

Everyone's talking can be bumpy sometimes, but it's ok

Don't avoid it –
reassure the child

When we learn to talk, it can be a bit tricky



Aim : build confidence and self esteem, value what they have to say

How to help with stammering

<https://youtu.be/miAkxYSabko>

Talking to a child

<https://youtu.be/R58tq57sCVM>

Becoming more comfortable with stammering

<https://youtu.be/R58tq57sCVM>

One to one time with your child

<https://youtu.be/R58tq57sCVM>

How to talk about stammering

<https://youtu.be/R58tq57sCVM>

7 tips for talking with the child who stutters

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTpckAufNDE>



Key Message

There are lots of simple strategies we can use to support fluent speech in the Early Years

Most of what we do is to focus on the environment – particularly the ways adults interact

We aim for children to stay at a low level of awareness that anything is going 'wrong' with their talking and not draw unhelpful attention to their speech

Saying 'stop, slow down, start again' feels instinctively helpful but is not!

Factors That May Affect Fluency

Tiredness

Stressful
situations

Talking in
front of
group

Reading
aloud

When
'put on
the spot'

Answering
register

Being
interrupted

Feeling
rushed

Excitement

Sudden
change in
routine

Describing/
explaining
something using
complex
language

Demands and Capacities Model (DCM)

The DCM is an indirect approach in that it targets the child's environment, attempting to lessen the demands on the child while building the child's capacity for fluency.

Demands

- What ideas the child is trying to get over.
- How much the child is trying to keep up with others.
- What others are asking the child to do or say.
- Language complexity level.
- How tired the child is.
- How excited the child is.



Capacity to use language

- Choose the right words.
- Remember which order to put words in a sentence.
- Sequence the sounds in each word.
- Use all of the many different muscles to say all those sounds.
- Express emotions in tone of voice.
- Time when to speak for a turn in the conversation.

Reduce
demands to
increase
capacity to use
fluent language

Balance the
scales!

Demand	How to help
Being interrupted or rushed to talk	Parents can help their child by ensuring that everybody listens to each other and tries not to interrupt the speaker. The child will then feel able to take his time and this can help him to be more fluent. It's also important to remember to keep things fair – other family members should also have their say, as well as the child who stammers.
Excitement	Being calmer will help the child to stammer less. Can parents think of other ways, apart from telling the child, in which they could help them to calm down?
Tiredness	A child will stammer more when they are tired. Can parents think of ways to help them not tire themselves out so much or get more rest? Ensuring a consistent bedtime routine?
Vocabulary Burst - trying to use more complex language	Lots of children stammer more when they use sophisticated language. If parents use simple uncomplicated language, this will help the child keep things fairly simple so that they are less likely to stammer.
Responding to a question	Parents can help their child to answer more fluently by: • avoiding questions which are too complicated for their child • giving the child plenty of time to think and give their reply • avoiding asking another question before the child has had time to answer the first one • use open ended comments instead of questions
Competing for parents attention/ sibling rivalry	If parents are able to give their child some 1:1 'quality' time, this may help the child who stammers as they have their parent's undivided attention and there is no need to rush. In a busy family lifestyle, parents may find it useful to have a brief (5minutes) regular slot with each child.



The
Michael Palin
Centre
for stammering

- Designed by the Michael Palin Centre (specialist centre for stammering based in London)
- Designed for the younger age group but can be used as a basis of therapy for older children
- An indirect approach to therapy aiming to change the child's environment.
- Parents do not cause a child's stammer but they are a key factor in a child's life and can have a positive influence on helping their child to develop more fluent speech

PCI aims

- To identify the interaction styles within the family which may help the child towards more fluent speech
- To improve the family's confidence and skill
- We know that young children's fluency is highly variable and that periods of fluency can be suddenly interrupted by a period of stammering. The task of the therapist and the parents is to identify the aspects that might be influencing the "good" patches, and the factors which may be less helpful at the moment.

Special Time

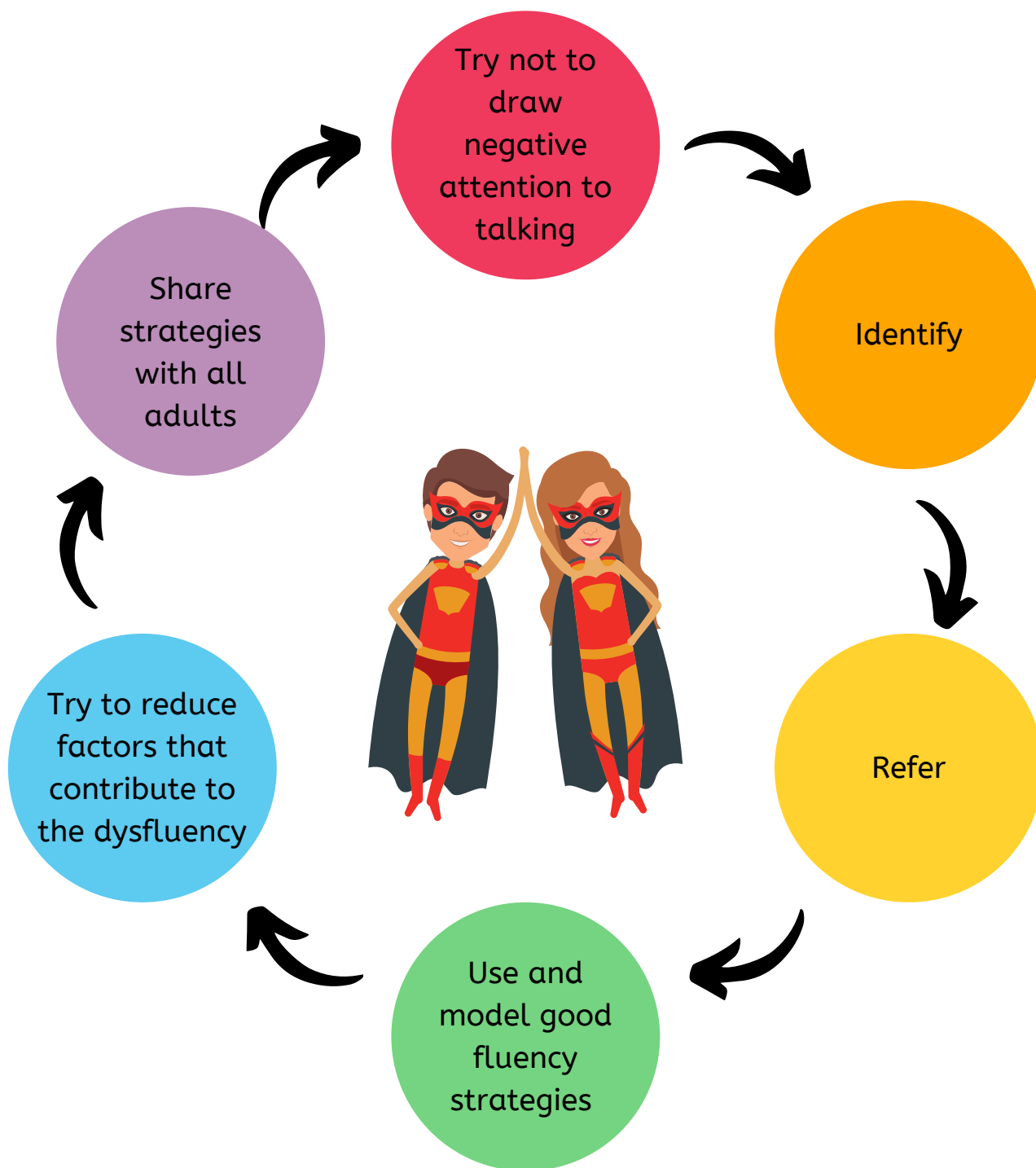
- ★ 5-10 minutes daily
- ★ Child led
- ★ Be at the child's level and at their pace
- ★ No interruptions
- ★ Not rushed
- ★ Focus can be on a non speech activity or game – child's choice
- ★ Chance for adult to practice good fluency strategies



Ongoing Intervention

- Is led by the person who stammers
- Some receive no therapy, some do not seek support until much later into adulthood
- Some will use 'fluency shaping' strategies
- Some openly embrace their stammering
- Everyone will experience stammering in their own way at their own pace.

Role of the Early Years Practitioner



The Dragon's Scale – (a short film about a boy teaching his dad that he is okay with his stammer)

<https://vimeo.com/208408397>

An account of stammering and SLT

<https://youtu.be/U8xlNBmYdqQ>

A woman who stammers who turned to comic writing to represent stammering in the media more representatively

<https://stamma.org/your-voice/creating-dysfluent-heroes-i-needed-kid>

It's not ok to laugh at someone who stammers

<https://stamma.org/your-voice/its-not-ok-laugh-someone-who-stammers>

Stammering and dyslexia

<https://stamma.org/do-dyslexia-and-stuttering-share-processing-deficit>

BBC 3 – things not to say to someone who stammers (some strong language)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlDi0bMNV6g>

500 words competition 'The words that wouldn't come out'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/372bhKvZDWRcmbwZ90WGYF9/the-word-that-wouldnt-come-out-silver-winner>

Book: Stutterer Interrupted by Nina G

ISBN: 9781631526428