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Submission from the British Stammering Association – in response to the APPG Oracy inquiry ‘Speak for Change’

Stammering is a physical difficulty in getting words – children who stammer may repeat, prolong and/or block on sounds and words. Stammering is often accompanied by feelings of shame, frustration, embarrassment, fear and worry, leading to loss of confidence and self-esteem.

are concerned that teachers are not trained in supporting children who stammer, nor are they equipped to identify children who stammer, and that action needs to be taken to prevent the likely negative consequences on the child’s educational social development, and long-term damage to their career development, income, and social expectations.

There are likely to be children who stammer in every class in primary and secondary schools. Teachers play a pivotal role here, in working with parents, identifying a child who stammers (which may include hidden stammer), and working with speech and language therapists to find ways to support a child. the evidence is that this doesn’t happen.

Oracy (spoken language) underpins our learning, social and communication skills, friendships, negotiating and problem-solving and supports the development of written language (The Communication Trust).

Current position

- 8% of children will be affected by stammering (Yairi & Ambrose, 2013). This suggests that around 1 to 2 children in a class of 30 will have a stammer.
- Children who stammer usually start stammering between the ages of 2 to 5, a crucial developmental stage of a child’s life.
- Identification of stammering is not straightforward because a common strategy for children who stammer is to hide their stammer by staying quiet, changing words and avoiding speaking situations.
- We understand that teachers receive no consistent formal training in identifying a child who stammers, or supporting a child who stammers, both within their initial teacher training and post-qualification.

Impact of stammering at school

- At the very time a stammer develops, between the ages of 2 to 5, children start to become more socially aware of differences and the need to conform, and consequently can respond negatively

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to children who stammer. Research indicates that children who stammer are more likely to be bullied and teased by their peer group because of their stammer (Langevin, Packman & Onslow, 2009). This can result in low self-esteem and lack of confidence.

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- The inability to easily communicate because of a stammer can have a negative impact on children who stammer including feelings of frustration, fluctuations in mood, lack of confidence and difficulty in talking to peers (Langevin, Packman & Onslow, 2010). As a result, they may become withdrawn and reluctant to contribute to class discussions and to form friendships.

Impact of stammering: long term

- The experience of stammering in childhood can have long-term effects, with research indicating that people who stammer are at greater risk of developing social anxiety (Iverach & Rapee, 2014), because of the fear of being judged negatively on account of their stammer. Craig, Blumgart and Tran's 2009 study showed that stammering negatively affects quality of life, including vitality, social and emotional functioning and mental health.
- Work-wise we conservatively estimate that people who stammer are likely to be at least twice as likely to be unemployed (more so if someone has a severe and overt stammer), and they also may experience difficulty in finding work or settle for work below their potential with few communication demands (Klein & Hood, 2004).
- This research is reflected in the lived experiences of our members; parents of children who stammer often report their children are not receiving adequate support at school. In a recent survey, 56% of our members reported their choice of career had been affected by their stammer and that 60% had been bullied because of their stammer, with 44% reporting they had been bullied at school.

Experiences of a parent

son woke up one day shortly after his 2nd birthday with an awful stammer. He was always a good talker. clear but had lots of words and talking in short sentences by 18 months. It was horrible watching suddenly unable to get his words out. I got him referred to speech therapy and for the last six years stammering has come and gone. Over the past 2 school years I've noticed it not really going away. But both his yr 2 and yr3 teachers have said that he doesn't stammer at school and there no concerns. BUT my son says he does stammer at school and kids are starting to mimic him which is upsetting him. really think it's time I saw someone again and be taken seriously. He is almost 9 and it's as bad as ever at the moment. How do I even get referred if school aren't supportive? Do I go to GP? I have no idea who to speak to anymore. It most definitely is affecting him now he's getting older.'

Comment from a teacher who stammers

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a teacher with a stammer, colleagues would often come and seek my advice on how to best support children in their care who stammer. This training had been provided at the training institution and they weren't sure where to turn. Formalising training for educators is vital in ensuring a consistent approach all our young people struggling within school because of their stammer.'

Adam Black'

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Comment from a speech and language therapist the benefits of working with school staff

have been impressed by the prompt responses from SENCOs/senior teachers when I have needed to raise a concern about bullying for stammering in school. I believe their intervention to stop it has made a real change for the child.'

Recommendations

- Teacher training should cover both the identification of stammering and support strategies (ie a communication friendly environment, working with parents and working with speech and language therapists)
- There are some fantastic examples of how support can be provided for children with speech, language and communication needs. Examples of best practice are highlighted in the 2019 [Shine a Light Awards](#). Of particular note in relation to oracy are Battledown Centre for Children, Cheltenham (winner of the Early Years Setting of the Year award) and Longmoor Primary School, Liverpool (winner of the Primary School of the Year award).
- Liaison between teachers and speech and language therapists needs to be actively encouraged to ensure a child receiving speech and language therapy is also receiving appropriate support in school.

References:

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<https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/>
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