



Position statement on cluttering

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Cluttering: An RCSLT Position Statement

Introduction

This document is for managers and commissioners of speech and language therapy services across the four nations of the UK. It outlines the nature of cluttering, the benefits of speech and language therapy, and the risks of a lack of service provision.

What is cluttering?

Cluttering is a different way of talking that is caused by a complex range of factors including neurophysiology.

Cluttering consists of a fast and irregular rate of speech and is sometimes associated with language planning and word finding difficulties, all of which reduce intelligibility. It commonly occurs alongside stammering, dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD and autism (Sommer et al., 2021). People who clutter may experience psychosomatic symptoms and depression (Zukerman et al., 2024).

Cluttering is developmental, starting in childhood and typically noticed at primary or secondary school age.

Role of speech and language therapists

Speech and language therapists play a key role in supporting children, young people and adults who clutter. Using specialist skills, they work directly with the individual client and with others in their life to ensure that the speaking environment is as supportive as possible. For children this involves working with parents, carers and school. Speech and language therapists support young people and adults to be able to understand more about cluttering and what is happening when they talk and to be able to advocate for themselves. Therapy may include the use of strategies to increase speech intelligibility whilst recognising that these can be effortful and so may only be used some of the time.

Benefits of providing a speech and language therapy service

There are multiple benefits of speech and language therapy for people who clutter.

- Speech and language therapists are qualified professionals who must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council. The quality and safety of their practice are guided by a professional code of ethics and standards of practice.
- SLTs supporting people who clutter can facilitate their awareness and ability to self-monitor their speech (van Zaalen & Reichel, 2015).
- The communication skills and mental health benefits and increased participation gained from speech and language therapy enhance both educational and employment outcomes (Duchan, 2022).
- Speech and language therapists offer training to other professionals to increase early identification and referral. They advocate for people who clutter to ensure a supportive communication environment such as in schools.
- Speech and language therapists support people who clutter to achieve their communicative potential and advocate for themselves where necessary

Risks of not providing a speech and language therapy service

The risks of not providing an adequate speech and language therapy service are considerable in terms of the cost to the individual and to society. The impact of cluttering extends far beyond speech. The absence of speech and language therapy support is likely to mean that people who clutter might feel misunderstood (Scaler-Scott & St. Louis, 2011) and are more likely to experience mental health conditions including anxiety (Zukerman et. al., 2024).

Workforce

Speech and language therapists working with people who clutter typically also work with people who stammer. To provide adequate care for people who clutter, each speech and language therapy service should ensure an appropriate level of clinical knowledge and skill mix across the workforce. This includes a combination of speech and language therapists who:

- work with a general caseload
- allocate specific time to cluttering and stammering
- possess highly specialist expertise in cluttering and stammering.

It is advisable for services to consider their current workforce skills mix for cluttering in terms of access to specialist practitioners e.g. for shadowing, mentoring and supervision opportunities.

Recommendations for future work

Training standards and competency

It is recommended that in future a competency framework, training log and associated guidance are developed.

Acknowledgements

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The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) is the professional body for speech and language therapists in the UK. As well as providing leadership and setting professional standards, the RCSLT facilitates and promotes research into the field of speech and language therapy, promotes better education and training of speech and language therapists, and provides its members and the public with information about speech and language therapy.

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