

This is the brief story of my son, [REDACTED] and his stuttering. It started around age 3. He would get stuck on a word and would get very frustrated and say 'stuck'. I was told by his pre school teacher that she thought he had a stutter and that we should seek assistance through Queenscliff Health Services (in Manly, NSW). I did not act fast on this advice, stupid and young, and clueless to the severity of this situation. Then I did contact Queenscliff, and we sat on a wait list for hmmm 6-12 months I guess. [REDACTED] started therapy aged 5, first or second term of his first year of school.

The therapy offered was The Lidcombe Method. I was told straight away that he was probably too old for it to be effective, that it is most effective before starting school. I don't know what was really the problem, but no, it was not effective. It is quite 'babyish' for want of a better word. [REDACTED] was quite a mature little boy, and the therapy is full of things like 'good talking, good smooth talking' repeated over and over. He looked at me like I was a patronising twit. Anyway, I can see the therapy could work with 3-4 year olds, but it didn't work for us.

Then I was told there was nothing else to be done. The Lidcombe Method is apparently the only way to stop stuttering. Any other therapies on offer after this age are smoothing-over techniques, and a retraining of the speech. Queenscliff had nothing else to offer us ... the therapy didn't work and our free sessions (10?) had run out.

So we sat. We listened to his stutter get better and worse and better and worse. We couldn't afford private speech therapy, even if I did believe in it's effectiveness, which I didn't. Don't.

I researched and researched and found The McGuire Program in Sydney. They only took adults. A few months before [REDACTED] was due to start High School we finally had some money to spare, and I begged and cried and pleaded his case and asked for an exception. They accepted him and he attended their 4 day course. It was truly fabulous for both him and I. It is not a cure, and does require a commitment by the student for it to be successful long term. I saw people who could not even introduce themselves to me on day one, get up and give a speech and sing by the last day in front of hundreds of people. The McGuire program essentially teaches a breathing method, and to speak on top of the breath (kind of like what an opera singer would do). My nearly teenage son does not like using the method because it makes him sound different. He is yet to work out that his stutter already makes him different, and he may as well work on this breathing and speech pattern so he can get himself heard. His grand plan, aged 14 now, is to say nothing while out in public. At home, he never shuts up, chat chat chat, stuttering all the way. He stutters the most with me, his Mother. I learned that is very common. I am at least pleased that he has the tools, any time he likes, to change his speech pattern. When he matures a little, the McGuire Program has given him everything he needs to correct his speech.

His stutter has shaped who he is. He has zero self confidence. He has social anxiety around his peers and people older. Around younger people he relaxes a little bit. He is a follower rather than a leader because he will not initiate ideas or plans, he just smiles and goes along with the crowd. This is a shame, because I can tell he is actually a natural leader. As a mother, I just have to faith that he will grow into a comfortable and confident man. Certainly his childhood has been spent in a state of constant social discomfort.

I wish I knew that the stutter could only be cured aged 3 or 4. Would I have even believed it if someone had slapped me and told me straight? Who's job is that? Perhaps preschooler teachers need to be better educated on it too. I was warned, but in a wishy washy, you could try ringing Queenscliff ... I have no blame to put on them don't get me wrong. But teaching the Lidcombe method to kindy teachers could be interesting? Or even just imparting the news that early intervention is IMPERATIVE.