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WELCOME

So you want to set up a group. Great!
We're here to help.

We know that one of the most powerful things that someone who stammers can experience is meeting others who stammer and being able to share stories and advice.

Being part of a group of people who have a shared experience in common can provide a lot of support and be hugely rewarding.

There are several well-established groups that work very successfully. The group in Cambridge has been running for over a decade, while the Nottingham group has been running since 1986.

We'll do our best to support you, shout if you want help with something specific. For more advice and suggestions about getting started, you may wish to speak to the people who are helping to run the more established self-help groups in different parts of the country. You can get contact details for most of these on our website or from the BSA office.

STAMMA

STARTING A GROUP



Decide how you'd like your group to run. Your group will evolve and outgrow your vision, but start somewhere. Meet with others and discuss how you want the group to be. Will you run a formal group, with a chair and deputy, or is this more of a social group, hanging out once a month at a local café? Will people take turns in convening meetings? How regularly will you meet and where? It's good to agree a regular schedule and location so people can rock up last minute.

Do you want to talk about stammering all the time and share experiences of therapies, techniques and interventions? Or is your group about hanging out with others who understand? Do you want a speech and language therapist to help run the group? There's no reason that meetings can't take different forms each time. Don't be afraid to mix it up but make sure everyone has a voice and feels ownership of the group and the agenda.

What's the function of the group? You and your members will determine this. Even if groups share the same problem, the goals they set themselves may be very different.

For some the purpose is to practice techniques and talk about fluency, for others it maybe the social side that is the priority.

Do you want to invite speakers talking about the different therapies available, or is this about stammering out and proud?

Find some like-minded people. Seek others in our Facebook group, talk with your local NHS speech and language therapy service.

WHERE

You could meet somewhere relaxed and public, like a pub or a café. Find out about local venues at your Council for Voluntary Service and local council, library and newspapers.

A community centre or church hall can be cheap if you want your group to be more private. If your focus is on therapy and self help, then a the speech & language therapy department may be useful. Somewhere regular will give meetings a continuity. Will you need parking or kitchen facilities? How easy is to get to? How accessible is it? Who takes care of the keys? What's the policy on alcohol?

MEMBERSHIP

Who will be members of the group? What activities do you want to do? Will you ask for subscriptions? What if people don't pay - do they stop being members? Will members need to make some commitment; i.e. agree with the objectives of the group? Will they be required to attend regularly? Must they take on some task at some stage such as a presentation, leading a group or providing biscuits?

Think about a comfortable number for the group - do you need a minimum number of people to avoid discussions feeling awkward, or can you see a point where you may have too many members for everyone to feel like they've had the space and time to speak? What would you do if you attracted more members than felt comfortable ?

MONEY

How will you cover costs? It can just be a jar each week to cover the venue (and tea/coffee) or you might end up being more formal as time goes by.

With time small grants might be available from local authorities or small trusts, either to keep the group going or to fund something adventurous – the whole group attending an international convention around stammering say.

NEW MEMBERS

Accepting new members is important; agree on how to introduce and involve new members. Consider:

- The situation will be unfamiliar to new members, and the group are strangers to them.
- Newcomers may be talking about their stammer for the first time.
- Newcomers may find it embarrassing to speak in a group of people they do not know.
- They will have their personal history about their stammer.
- They may harbour strong feelings, which they are not aware of.
- They may be seeking to change part of themselves, or come to terms with their stammer.

Whatever the conclusions to these points, the group should be welcoming and supportive.

LEADERSHIP

A group leader or leaders naturally evolve or are elected. Usually a couple of people will start the group, and then the leadership of the group may change. While someone needs to take the lead in some of the organising (booking the room, getting the keys, putting up a notice, updating social channels), they don't need to be the person who hosts the group, it is good to take turns. Leadership behaviour will influence the way the group develops. A good group leader will:

- not allow one person to dominate the group
- use the group to grandstand about their own experiences
- communicate empathy and respect
- have good listening skills
- be flexible and adaptable
- let others lead

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A leader will be sensitive to one person dominating the group and will respond to difficult behaviour from members who withdraw or become overbearing. A leader will be sensitive to one person dominating the group and will respond to difficult behaviour from members who withdraw or becoming overbearing.

CHILDREN

It is the policy of the British Stammering Association that young people under 18 years may be allowed to join BSA-supported self-help groups, if accompanied by a parent. Reasons for and against attendance by children will have to be considered by the other members of your group.

You should meet with one or both of the attending child's parents and be quite detailed and thorough when explaining the expectations and activities of the group. The group must be briefed before any child attends, so the group can be sensitive in its conduct, e.g. use of language and humour.

The BSA does not define an adult who stammers as being vulnerable purely on the basis of their stammer. Your group will need a written child protection and vulnerable adult policy which must be understood by all the group and followed. The BSA can help with drafting this.

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CONFLICT

People will want different things, and at the start hopes and expectations will be high - especially if the group starts out large. If conflicts are faced and managed, i.e. there's a serious attempt to bring sides together, this will allow for growth and stability. Here are some things to try:

- Build support from other group members.
- Build on contribution of others to develop discussion
- Interrupt someone who is dominating / being disruptive
- Seek clarity on what the conflict is / what's happening
- Avoid being defensive or competing with the person causing disruption
- Break groups into smaller groups
- Get individuals to be precise about their criticism without being personal
- Keep in mind and act in accordance to the framework and protocols of the group

FRAMEWORK

A framework will set up a way of taking decisions, stopping one person dominating the group, give the group stability and continuity and allow new members to get an idea of what to expect and how to bring their own ideas and experiences to the group.

CONSIDER

- How big is your group now, how large might it become and will you restrict numbers?
- Choose a structure which allows most members to join in.
- Encourage new members to take on jobs.
- A time-limit for the leadership
- Don't let discussion of how the group is run take precedence over experiences of members
- Avoid 'cliques'

Are there professionals, ie speech & language therapists in the group? Do you want a constitution?

FIRST MEETING & BEYOND

Give the BSA at least a couple weeks' notice so we can announce your first meeting on our website and on social. Send a press release to your local speech & language therapy department, radio station and paper. Get a letter on the comments page or put an item in the community announcements or notices column or community facebook group. Send notices to your local library, put them up at the supermarket and coffee shop notice boards. We can help you with drafting a press release and getting the word out.

Set an agenda for the meetings - or at least agree a focus. Think about different activities or areas of focus from month to month. Email the agenda to members - but use the BCC function so that people can't see everyone else's emails! Personal data needs to be kept confidential, you need to record their express consent to contact them.

Decide on a trial period of three to six months, see what happens and review at the end of this period. Talk to attendees and see if the timing, location and format of meetings suits them. If people stopped attending meetings find out what would have kept them coming. It will take a while to see if things are going to work out.



Whatever the conclusions to these points, membership should have a common bond: a similar problem, a common feeling or outlook, or a particular characteristic in common; i.e. stammering. Will your group be providing information, advice and personal support

ICE BREAKERS

During your first few meetings and as new members join your group it is useful to have a few exercises to help people to get to know one another. Ideas for these "ice breaker" activities include:

- Split into pairs and share 2 good and 2 bad things of the day.
- Introduce each other
- Share the week's good news
- Introduce an item of rare knowledge
- Each person share two things about them that are true and one that's false. The group has to guess the lie
- What's everyone's favourite (insert a subject, ie flower, biscuit, car) and why?

It can be liberating to hear how others have dealt with similar experiences to you. You might decide to talk about a particular time when your stammer was a challenge or a moment of achievement. What insights have helped you? How tough, or easy, has this past week been?

CODE OF CONDUCT & PRIVACY

The British Stammering Association ensures that it complies with the law including the Equality Act 2010 so that no employee, volunteer worker or member receives less favourable treatment on grounds of race, colour, nationality, religion or other belief, racial or ethnic origins, age, gender, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.

The BSA will only recognise and support local groups or networks which agree to conduct themselves in accordance with the principles this policy.

All group members should be aware of the policy, and it is the responsibility of the chair/organiser to ensure that it is dealt with in the induction process for new members.

Group members must feel able to speak with the group chair/organiser about how to deal with any situation arising which they feel conflicts with the equal opportunities policy.

If you are going to keep electronic records - ie email addresses of members - you need to ensure you have written and dated permission from members to use this and any other information about them, and that there is a clear path for them to check this information and have the information deleted.

Group members must feel safe in the knowledge that their confidentiality will be respected, regardless of person or subject.