

# SUPPORTING STAFF AND COLLEAGUES WHO STAMMER

## About this Guide

This guide provides managers and colleagues of people who stammer with information on reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

STAMMA also provide a guide for employees who stammer.

Reasonable adjustments amend typical procedures and working practices so that they are suitable for staff members who stammer. They ensure that the employee can fulfil their job role fully and with confidence. This allows the company and colleagues to benefit from their expertise and skills. You can share either document with your employee to start a conversation about reasonable adjustments.

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# INTRODUCTION

People who stammer can face many barriers in the workplace, often without the organisation realising that such barriers even exist. Intercoms or the way meetings are run, can prevent someone who stammers from getting on with the job. We explore these barriers and how you can deal with them through reasonable adjustments. Taking a fresh look at ways of working can open the door to getting the best from your staff and create a working

environment where all staff, including those who stammer, can thrive.

## About This Document

This document gives ideas for reasonable adjustments that can make your working procedures more inclusive. It's important to remember that people who stammer are not all the same. Patterns and experiences of stammering, as well as personal preference, vary enormously. Some people who stammer will benefit from a range of reasonable adjustments, some

will not want any, and many people may benefit from a few adjustments.

In the tables below, we list some of the challenges your organisation might be dealing with. Then we give ideas for reasonable adjustments that could be useful. See which ones resonate with you and your employees. Everyone is different, not all the ideas will be relevant, and it's not an exhaustive list. But it hopefully gives you a starting point so you can think about what can work well for you and your employee.

# INTRODUCTIONS & ICEBREAKERS

Workplace Challenge	Suggestions	Company benefits
<p><b>My team member:</b>  worries about stammering when saying their name or making small talk.  can't focus on anyone else's introductions because they are putting so much effort into preparing for their own.  tends to avoid situations where they are expected to introduce themselves or make small talk.  turns up late to meetings so they don't have to introduce themselves.  Some people are taken by surprise when they first see or hear my team member stammer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Agree in advance when their turn will be when group introductions are being made.</li> <li>▪ Meeting chair makes all the introductions</li> <li>▪ Staff member is introduced rather than introducing themselves.</li> <li>▪ Use an on-screen background that incorporates their name and lets others know that they stammer during videocalls.</li> <li>▪ Use name badges rather than verbal introductions for in-person meetings.</li> <li>▪ Use on-screen names rather than verbal introductions during videocalls.</li> <li>▪ Use a pre-recorded greeting and introduction when working on the telephone</li> </ul>	<p>Colleagues are more likely to feel confident when meeting new people and working together.  Introductions become, as they should be, a gateway, rather than a barrier. "Icebreaker" exercises become useful and effective.</p> <p>Good working relationships between team members.</p> <p>Team members will be more relaxed and confident as the stress has been taken out of the situation.</p> <p>It's not only people who stammer who sometimes find introductions difficult. Seeing that we have acknowledged this and have thought about adjustments will help DEI throughout the organisation.</p>

# USING THE PHONE

Workplace Challenge	Suggestions	Company benefits
<p><b>My team member:</b></p> <p>finds phone calls difficult because the person they're talking to is taken by surprise when they stammer</p> <p>finds phone calls difficult because the other person can't see when they are stammering and doesn't wait for them to speak</p> <p>finds phone calls difficult because they stammer on the standard greeting or on specific words that the company demands that they use</p> <p>sometimes gets hung up on when they stammer because the other person mistakenly thinks it's 'a bad line'</p> <p>finds it harder to speak on the phone when they are in a noisy environment or when there is an 'audience' in the room</p> <p>finds making phonecalls more difficult when they don't know the topic of the conversation in advance</p> <p>finds making phone calls difficult because they've previously had some very negative experiences of ridicule or impatience when they stammered during a phone call</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A quieter space to make phone calls.</li> <li>▪ Flexibility to not use the standard greeting or company terminology when working on the phone.</li> <li>▪ Use a pre-recorded greeting and introduction when working on the phone.</li> <li>▪ Pre-arranged time for calls so both parties know who is calling, when and what the topic will be.</li> <li>▪ Use Relay UK for phone calls.</li> <li>▪ Flexible options to meet face-to-face, via videocall or use emails, instead of using the phone.</li> </ul>	<p>My team members enjoy working on the phone.</p> <p>Feel comfortable in their surroundings so they can focus their attention on the task and the person they are speaking to.</p> <p>Reduced unnecessary procedures mean my team members can focus their attention on the task rather than juggling the demands of an increase in their stammering.</p> <p>Flexible options for communication channels means my team members can choose the option that allows them to produce their best work.</p>

## INTERCOMS & RADIOS

Workplace Challenge	Suggestions	Company benefits
<p><b>My team member:</b> has difficulty accessing intercom-controlled buildings or work areas because the receptionist cannot see them and either talks over them or thinks that no-one is there.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Adopt intercom systems that combine video and audio, rather than audio-only. So reception can see that someone is there.</li> <li>▪ Training for reception staff on working with people with communication differences.</li> <li>▪ Pre-arranged arrival time so that team members can be met at the entrance.</li> <li>▪ Flexibility to opt out of using intercoms.</li> <li>▪ Alternative entry options for the building.</li> </ul>	<p>staff who stammer can get into workplace locations easily to carry out their work role.</p> <p>Locations are more accessible for all colleagues with communication differences.</p> <p>Reception staff are more comfortable interacting with colleagues with communication differences.</p>
<p>finds using the radio difficult because colleagues interrupt them when they are stammering.</p> <p>finds using the radio difficult because they have to use specific terminology which they often stammer on.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use of specific callsigns on group radio channels so that specific users can indicate that you need more time to talk.</li> <li>▪ Flexibility to <b>not</b> use standard terminology when communicating via radio</li> <li>▪ Flexibility to use other communication channels rather than the radio.</li> </ul>	<p>Team members can communicate effectively with their colleagues.</p>

# CONTRIBUTING TO MEETINGS

Workplace Challenge	Suggestions	Company benefits
<p><b>My team member:</b></p> <p>doesn't get involved in meetings as they find it difficult to break in to fast-moving discussions.</p> <p>doesn't get involved in meetings because their colleagues interrupt them or don't notice when they are trying to speak.</p> <p>tends to say less than they want to in meetings because they are not comfortable with their colleagues hearing them stammer.</p> <p>say less than they want to in meetings because the physical effort of speaking and stammering in this setting leaves them exhausted.</p> <p>doesn't contribute in online meetings because they find it hard to watch themselves stammering on the screen.</p> <p>worries about meetings because they've had previous negative experiences being talked over, excluded or even mocked in this setting.</p>	<p><b>Physical and online meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Stammered speech is welcomed and respected in meetings.</li> <li>▪ Agendas distributed in advance so that participants can let the Chair know they want to speak on one or more topic.</li> <li>▪ Good management of turn-taking within meetings so that everyone can get involved.</li> <li>▪ Everyone uses a visual signal to indicate when they wish to speak rather than jumping in verbally.</li> <li>▪ Participants can use visual and written materials instead of or as well as speaking. These materials to be given equal weighting with speech.</li> <li>▪ Can contribute in writing before or after meetings.</li> </ul> <p><b>Online meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use the chat function to support or instead of speaking. Typed contributions given equal weight with talking.</li> <li>▪ Use on-screen backgrounds that display participants' name</li> <li>▪ Use on-screen backgrounds so others know they stammer.</li> <li>▪ Use the platform's built-in tech so that the person does not have to view their own video stream during the meeting but can be seen by others.</li> </ul>	<p>Feeling comfortable within meetings means team members can concentrate on what their colleagues are saying rather than having all their attention absorbed in preparing for their own contributions.</p> <p>Active involvement in meetings means that team members can contribute their opinion, knowledge, and skills. We make better decisions as a team when everyone is involved.</p> <p>The organisation becomes more inclusive on a practical level, as all voices can be heard.</p>

# PRESENTING

Workplace Challenge	Suggestions	Company benefits
<p><b>My team member:</b>            doesn't enjoy presenting because they find speaking in front of an audience very challenging.</p> <p>doesn't enjoy presenting because they are concerned that the audience will silently or outwardly criticise or misjudge them for stammering.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Stammered speech is welcomed and respected within presentations.</li> <li>▪ Option for the speaker to inform the audience that they stammer prior to the presentation</li> <li>▪ Flexibility around the format of presentations, e.g.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ present with a colleague or in a group using visual/written resources as well as speaking</li> <li>▪ pre-record a video presentation</li> <li>▪ share information in a different way, such as a written report or a powerpoint slide show.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Study leave to participate in specialist public speaking or presentation skills training for people who stammer.</li> </ul>	<p>My team members can get involved in presentations.</p> <p>Feel comfortable within the setting and so can develop their presentation skills and deliver high quality presentations.</p> <p>As an organisation, we understand that good communication is more than on-the-spot fluency. Less predictable communication styles can create interesting, dynamic presentations that hold the attention of the audience and help them engage with the content.</p>

# INTERVIEWING

Workplace Challenge	Suggestions	Company benefits
<p>Interview practices restrict candidates who stammer from demonstrating skills, knowledge, and competence.</p> <p>Screening process involves a phone call but calls with unfamiliar people can be a significant barrier for people who stammer.</p> <p>Research shows that interviewers are likely to be unconsciously biased against candidates who stammer.</p> <p>The process requires my candidate to use specific terminology which can be hard for my candidate to say.</p> <p>Candidate swaps words to avoid stammering, so their answers aren't as focused as they would like them to be.</p> <p>To avoid stammering, my candidate tends to say less than they want to and provide the necessary detail.</p> <p>There is not enough time to provide full answers because moments of stammering take up time, or because the candidate work find a different way of answering.</p> <p>Candidates stammer more in interviews than they do normally so it's hard for them to focus on the questions.</p> <p>My candidate finds it exhausting if they are stammering a lot so it can be hard for them to maintain their energy level throughout an interview.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Stammered speech is welcomed and respected.</li> <li>▪ Candidate's choice of face-to-face, online or telephone interview</li> <li>▪ Interviewers receive information about stammering, interviewer bias, the candidate's pattern of stammering and the way they work through moments of stammering in advance.</li> <li>▪ Interview questions sent out in advance.</li> <li>▪ Flex between written &amp; spoken responses</li> <li>▪ Bring notes and during the interview.</li> <li>▪ Make notes before answering a question</li> <li>▪ Use visual/written resources as well as speech.</li> <li>▪ Additional time, no time limit, or a slowed pace.</li> <li>▪ Interviewer checks that candidate has said everything they want for each question.</li> <li>▪ Option to provide further written responses in the 10 minutes following the interview</li> </ul>	<p>Candidates can demonstrate relevant skills, knowledge and competence so we find the best person for the job.</p> <p>Interviewers develop greater understanding of different communication styles and how to recruit the best talent.</p> <p>We fairly evaluate applicants' job-related skills and competence.</p> <p>We can demonstrate our commitment to diversity, equality and inclusion.</p> <p>We recruit a diverse and benefit from a diverse team.</p>

# NAVIGATING CONFLICT

Workplace Challenge	Suggestions	Company benefits
<p>My team member: finds it harder to speak when emotions are high</p> <p>-----</p> <p>tends to get talked over if they stammer when discussion difficult or emotional issues with colleagues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Stammered speech to be valued and respected within discussions</li> <li>▪ Good management of turn-taking in structured discussions around conflict</li> <li>▪ Option to use structured written communication channels or the Relay UK service when navigating conflict</li> <li>▪ A trusted manager or colleague to raise concerns with, and to provide feedback to, about communication, work issues, and general work culture</li> </ul>	<p>Proactive, appropriate ways of dealing with conflict benefits the whole team and the work we're trying to do.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Ensuring team members are able to highlight and address conflict means any issues are more likely to be resolved at an early stage.</p>

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH COLLEAGUES

Workplace Challenge	Suggestions	Company benefits
<p>Colleagues have difficulty understanding what it's like to stammer – they misinterpret my team member's stammering as a sign of nervousness, uncertainty or a lack of knowledge.</p> <p>My team member is sometimes reluctant to participate in conversations and meetings, particularly with unfamiliar people, because they are concerned about getting a negative response if they stammer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Stammered speech to be valued and respected in discussions</li> <li>▪ Education for colleagues so they have information about stammering and guidance on how to behave in conversation with someone who stammers</li> <li>▪ Education for colleagues so they don't carry outdated and incorrect stereotypes about stammering into their conversations with my team member</li> </ul>	<p>Information and guidance on communication will improve working relationships for all team members.</p> <p>Increasing understanding of stammering will lead to a more aware and considerate workforce, and will support the company in its aim for inclusion and diversity.</p>

# WORKPLACE WELLBEING

Workplace Challenge	Suggestions	Company benefits
<p>It's important to me to be an inclusive employer.</p> <p>It's important to me to get the best from my staff.</p> <p>It's important to me that my team members feel positive about their communication and work relationships.</p> <p>My team member seems to be experience more or fewer barriers than they have previously.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consider whether any of the reasonable adjustments in place for this team member could become the standard procedure for all.</li> <li>▪ Regular reviews of reasonable adjustments to accommodate changing needs.</li> <li>▪ The option to take study or disability leave to participate in relevant therapy or courses.</li> </ul>	<p>When my team members feel positive about their communication and work relationships, it helps them do their jobs to the best of their ability.</p>

Please help us to help others. Tell us your thoughts about using this document, how you are using reasonable adjustments, and what we can do better. Contact us at [employmentsupport@stamma.org](mailto:employmentsupport@stamma.org) or call our helpline on 0808 802 0002 and ask someone from the Employment Support Service to call you back.

**STAMMA**

Box 140, 43 Bedford St, London WC2E 9HA  
T: 020 8983 1003.

Reg charity numbers 1089967/SC038866

[stamma.org](http://stamma.org)

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**IT'S HOW WE TALK**