Unlocking Talent
Employers Stammering Network

Recruiting and Developing Employees who Stammer

This booklet is a best-practice guide for human resource/personnel departments and line managers.

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Contents

INTRODUCTION 3

PEOPLE WHO STAMMER:
    SOME FACTS 4

RECRUITMENT 5

ON THE JOB 6

THE EQUALITY ACT 2010 8

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION 9

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The Employers Stammering Network is a group of leading employers committed to creating a workplace in the UK where people who stammer can achieve their full career potential.

The Employers Stammering Network has the support of several leading private and public sector employers and employee representatives and it is the first network of its kind.
Introduction

The benefits of helping to develop people who stammer include:

- The person can become more confident to contribute and develop their skills and knowledge
- Better team communication
- Better team performance

People who stammer:

- Can succeed in management, sales, customer service, air-traffic control and a wide range of other jobs
- Can contribute a greater awareness of communication issues to the workplace
- Can have excellent listening skills
- Can understand the value of preparation for presentations and meetings
- Can have the resolve gained from working to overcome difficulties
- Can send out a clear message that your organisation accepts people on merit and is disability-aware.
People who stammer: 
Some Facts

What

- Stammering (also called stuttering) is a speech/fluency difficulty where the person has speech blocks (getting stuck on one sound; a silent block is when nothing comes out at all), prolongations (stretching sounds out), or repetitions of sounds.
- It is individual. Each person stammers differently, and this can vary from one day or situation to another. The person may also avoid words and situations because of anxiety and strong feelings about their stammering.
- It does not result from a personality or intellectual disorder. People who stammer tend to have normal intelligence, competence and ability.
- People who stammer know what they want to say but sometimes find it difficult to physically produce speech.

Remember:

Your patience and active listening are very helpful for people who stammer.

Why

Current research suggests it has a physiological basis in the workings of the brain, but the cause is not known. While stammering can cause people to be nervous about speaking, stammering is not caused by nervousness or uncertainty.

When

Tiredness, time pressure or anxiety can make stammering worse. It is rare to completely lose a stammer.

Where

Using the telephone, interviews, presentations and meetings can be more difficult, particularly when there is pressure to speak.

Who

One percent of adults in the UK stammer. Men are four times more likely to be affected than women.
Recruitment

When meeting a person who stammers, stay focused on what the person is saying about their experience, abilities and skills. It is normal to feel some anxiety or embarrassment, when listening to someone who stammers, so concentrating on what the person is saying can be a good way to deal with this.

As with most people, a job interview can be a very difficult speaking situation. Stammering may be at its most severe, particularly when the person is enthusiastic about the position they are being interviewed for.

Not all aspects of stammering are obvious. The person may come across as hesitant or confused, pausing before words and/or using phrases such as “you know”, “well actually”, “it could be said”. These may be strategies to avoid stammering.

Some people who stammer have found it helps if listeners do the following:

- Listen attentively and wait for the person to finish. Do not try to finish their words or sentences
- Speak normally in a relaxed manner, even if you are feeling uneasy
- Try to maintain natural eye contact with a relaxed posture
- Don’t equate hesitant speech with uncertainty
- If the person mentions their stammer, they will be more open to discussing it.

(Interviewers will, though, want to bear in mind the restrictions on pre-employment enquiries about disability under the Equality Act 2010.)
On the Job

When the person begins the job, introducing them to colleagues and managers can be a valuable way to break the ice. Try to show support by having an open-door approach. Stammering can be a sensitive personal issue that some people may not want to discuss. You may also find it difficult to discuss something you know little about.

You can find out more about stammering by contacting the British Stammering Association on 0208 983 1003 or visiting www.stammering.org.

Talk to your employee and encourage training and work opportunities in areas in which they may have excellent skills, but may have previously avoided. When the person feels confident about being open, stammering can become much less of a concern.

**PEOPLE WHO STAMMER MAY HOLD BACK FROM SPEAKING DUE TO:**

- Fear of a ‘classroom’ situation in meetings
- Fear of stammering when speaking in groups and giving presentations
- Lack of understanding of their stammering problem by managers, colleagues and course leaders

**Case Study**

"We didn’t dodge the issue by ignoring it – we talked about it, and I did it light-heartedly, maybe that was my way of coping."

– A manager at British Aerospace Systems

**WHEN SPEAKING WITH A PERSON WHO STAMMERS:**

- Show patience and active listening by focussing on what the person is saying
- Give the person more time to deal with any stammering
- Stammering varies widely, so don’t be put off if the person stammers when you would not expect them to
- If you begin group meetings by having colleagues introduce themselves, ask the person who stammers to go first or second. This will prevent anxiety building while they wait for their turn
On the telephone, please DO NOT hang up if you hear a few moments silence, and avoid negative impressions of a person based on the way they sound.

If it seems appropriate, ask the person about how best to respond when they stammer.

**PEOPLE WHO STAMMER SAY:**

*My stammer hasn’t stopped me taking public meetings and giving evidence to planning enquiries. People may be surprised, but they bear with me and it doesn’t stop me from communicating effectively.*

*By making it clear to me that I would not be penalised as a result of stammering, I became more comfortable in the work environment.*

**TRAINING AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT:**

- Encourage the person to develop their confidence and take on challenges which will benefit their speech, without pushing the person too far.
- Demonstrate your support by discussing with the person things they would like to achieve, and their successes and difficulties.
- Personal development and performance plans could include goals for important communication skills, in agreement with the employee. Agree on tasks that can be monitored, for example, talking at meetings, greeting clients and company visitors, and giving external presentations.
- Consider sponsoring an employee on a speech or personal development course as part of their training. If you are both comfortable with talking about stammering, you may want to discuss this with the person.

Courses often result in long-term gains in communication skills and confidence.

Promotion and responsibility depend more on the person’s skills and experience than on fluency.

People who stammer can make valuable contributions to a workplace through their awareness of communication. Focussed listening, clear thinking, approachability and an interest in people are qualities that do not depend on fluent speech, and may even be enhanced in people who stammer.

**Case Study**

John works as an administrator for AWE. "His self nomination for this [speech] course was supported as part of his personal development plan and, as a key player in a busy office, the course offered potential to improve both his confidence and fluency. The investment was rewarded with an immediate and significant positive change. John was much more relaxed and assured in his speech, and competence has been sustained through a programme of continuous personal development. He is now able to successfully take on challenges which have revealed an intuitive understanding about communications that is the envy of colleagues. This course was pivotal in giving access to a talent with wide reaching benefits to AWE and the wider community. Without it, we may have lost a great opportunity!"

– Ian Bowes, Director Human Resources and Strategic Development, AWE Aldermaston

**Remember:**

Ask the person about what they want to contribute to a job and about any concerns they may have.
The Equality Act 2010

Stammering can be a disability under the Equality Act. Discriminating against a person in relation to a stammer may be unlawful and the Act may require you to make some adjustments.

Some people who stammer do not consider themselves disabled, so you may want to mention these adjustments without reference to stammering as a disability.

Specific adjustments should normally be discussed with the person who stammers. Examples of reasonable adjustments could include:

- Allowing more time, if necessary, at interviews/presentations and oral assessments. (This, and written responses/alternatives as mentioned below, are best done through a prior arrangement)
- Greater consideration given to a job applicant’s written information (to supplement spoken answers, which may be limited) or, where appropriate, allowing written responses to interview questions and/or written alternatives to oral tests or presentations
- Ensuring the person has an opportunity to have their say at meetings
- Ensuring the person has adequate support and preparation when giving presentations
- Negotiating arrangements for telephone calls if they are a problem, for example allowing flexibility with a set script of words, and making available a quiet place for calls where the person does not feel overheard.

Problems with speech during an interview are not a reliable indication of how speech will be in the job, even in what might be seen as more ‘difficult’ or stressful job situations.

Access to Work grants can be available for altered auditory feedback devices, which help some people who stammer.

Disclaimer: The above is a broad summary and should not be used as a substitute for legal advice. Some useful sources of help and advice are listed below.
For additional support material and personal advice, contact:

The British Stammering Association / Employers Stammering Network
Tel: 020 8983 1003
Helpline: 0845 603 2001
Email: info@stammering.org
Website: www.stammering.org/employers

A useful book about stammering is “Stammering: Advice for all ages” by Renée Byrne and Louise Wright, available from the BSA or other booksellers.

Equality and Human Rights Commission
www.equalityhumanrights.com

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Website: www.equalityni.org

ACAS
A national body providing help and a conciliation service for work problems. Offers a helpline for both employers and employees, and also ‘Equality Direct’ service for small businesses.
www.acas.org.uk – 08457 47 47 47

In Northern Ireland, there is the Labour Relations Agency
www.lra.org.uk

Stammering and equality law website
www.stammeringlaw.org.uk

Business Disability Forum website
businessdisabilityforum.org.uk
About the British Stammering Association

The British Stammering Association (BSA) is the only national organisation for adults and children who stammer, run by people who stammer.

**OUR VISION:**
**A WORLD THAT UNDERSTANDS STAMMERING**

**OUR MISSION:**
- to initiate and support research into stammering
- to identify and promote effective therapies
- to offer support to all whose lives are affected by stammering
- to promote awareness of stammering

**HOW WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

**HELPING CHILDREN UNDER 5**
There is overwhelming evidence that speech therapy can produce remarkable results for children under five years. Our previous campaigns on early intervention have led to many more young children receiving therapy at the appropriate time.

**HELPING CHILDREN AND TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS**
We provide resources and a helpline to parents and schools about how to offer the best support for children during pre-school and school years:

www.stammeringineducation.net
www.stammeringineducation.net/expertparent

We provide resources to parents about how to get the best support for children during preschool and school years.

**INFORMATION AND SUPPORT FOR ADULTS**
Services for adults include contact with other people who stammer, social and support groups, information on employment issues, self-help and therapy, and the postal lending library. We do as much as we can to enable adults of all backgrounds and ages to get the most out of life in a world that takes fluent speech for granted.

**FREE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT SERVICE**
Parents of stammering children, teenagers and adults who stammer, friends, spouses, teachers, health visitors and employers can speak to us in person. This service is available in daytime and evening hours. We receive thousands of enquiries a year from our helpline and email service and we post free information packs as requested.

**WWW.STAMMERING.ORG**
We provide information on different types of therapy, new approaches, links to useful websites, and new research and technology.

**HOW WE WORK**

**TRUSTEES**
Our General Committee is made up mainly of people elected from the membership, and serving as Charity Trustees under the Charities Act.

**SPECIALISTS, STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**
The Trustees are able to call on a panel of specialist speech and language therapists to advise them. Professional staff members are employed to implement the policies, assisted by volunteers from the membership.

**RUN BY PEOPLE WHO STAMMER**
All members have the right to vote, and to stand for election as a Trustee. However, the general rule is that a majority of the Trustees must be people who stammer. This enables BSA to draw on all those willing to bring their talents and commitment to the Association, whilst still being an organisation run by people who stammer.

www.stammering.org