

Stammering and communication

This brief factsheet highlights some of the main impacts of stammering on communication.

It identifies general practical action you can take to remove barriers to participation that people with stammering may face. Remember every person is different.

The main communication barriers for people who stammer are:

- feelings of anxiety, embarrassment, shame and frustration
- a tendency to avoid situations in which they might stammer (e.g. speaking in groups or using the phone)
- feelings of being judged as less intelligent or not being taken seriously
- difficulties in asserting themselves or expressing their point of view.

Key actions

To support someone who stammers make sure:

- you are patient

Most people who stammer strongly prefer to speak for themselves.

Maintain natural eye contact, listen and wait patiently until the person has finished speaking.

- you are a good listener

Focus on the message and not how it is said.

- you remember that stammering varies

A person who stammers can find it hardest to say words when they are starting to speak and can become more fluent once underway.

Stammering is not caused by nervousness. Nervousness is a result of embarrassment about the stammering, rather than a cause of it.

- you ask the speaker if you are not sure how to respond.

For example: "Is there anything I can do to make this easier for you?"

If someone is stammering very severely, it may be better to ask a closed question, for example: "Would you prefer to go somewhere quieter?" or "Would you prefer to write this down?"

A closed question may be easier because it only requires a "yes" or "no" response. This can be given non-verbally with a shake or nod of the head.

Further information:

British Stammering Association (www.stammering.org)