

# Stammering

## WHAT IS STAMMERING?

May sound like	May look like	For some students, stammering may be accompanied by
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repetitions of single syllable words: but-but-but</li> <li>• Repetitions of parts of words: e.g. b-b-b-but</li> <li>• Prolongations: Iiiiiii can do it</li> <li>• Blocking (not being able to get started): I (c)-can do it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tension in the face or body</li> <li>• Looking away while speaking</li> <li>• Body movements because they are trying to push the word out (i.e. stamping feet, moving the head, blinking etc).</li> <li>• Fidget or move around (sitting or standing)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding words or talking less</li> <li>• Negativity around talking or negative emotional reactions such as frustration, embarrassment, or anxiety</li> <li>• Reduced confidence</li> </ul>

- About 5-8% of young students stammer at some point. The longer a student has been stammering the less likely it is to resolve spontaneously and some students and their families may opt to access speech and language therapy to develop a sense of self as a confident communicator, whether they stammer or not. 1% of the adult population continue to stammer.
- Stammering is a neurodevelopmental difference. There are a number of factors that contribute to whether a student starts to stammer, and the impact that it may have over time, including physiological factors, speech motor factors, emotional factors, language factors and environmental factors. It is very important that parents know that the causes of stammering are multifactorial and stammering is not caused by anything parents have done. There are many things that teachers and parents can do to support a young person who stammers.
- Some students may change words, or avoid certain words or talking situations in an effort to manage their stammering. We call this avoidance or safety behaviours. As they get older, some students become so adept at hiding/concealing their stammering in this way you may not hear much stammering and they may be perceived as 'quiet' in school. This is called covert stammering.
- At post-primary age, there may be times that a student stammers more or less, or with more or less effort, depending on a number of factors. For example they may stammer more if they are tired or unwell, when life is particularly busy or during a time of anxiety, such as school exams.

## HOW TO MAKE MY CLASSROOM STAMMER- FRIENDLY?

Every student who stammers is different. Some students are confident and do not experience worry about stammering, whilst for other's stammering can have a significant impact on them and can stop them from saying the things they want to say and doing things that they would like to do. Some students will benefit hugely from you making some accommodations/adjustments, whilst others may not require or want any accommodations/adjustments.

*Informed by: The Michael Palin Centre for stammering:*

<https://michaelpalincenreforstammering.org/about-stammering/teachers/>

*Reduce time pressures, for example:*

- ✓ give the student who stammers time to finish what they are saying
- ✓ model this to the rest of the class so they also know to wait and listen
- ✓ slow down your own rate of talking – aim for a relaxed pace and natural pausing
- ✓ reduce time pressure to speak or respond by encouraging all of the class to take their time to think before putting their hands up and by avoiding timed speaking tasks

*Build the student's confidence in communicating, for example:*

- ✓ let the student know that you value their participation and look for ways to help them to gradually join in more if speaking in front of the class appears to be difficult
- ✓ it is also helpful to nurture a classroom culture of kindness, inclusion and acceptance of difference and encourage listening and turn-taking within your classroom

*Be flexible with oral tasks and routines, for example:*

- ✓ consider allowing non-verbal responses to the register
- ✓ allow extra time in oral exams
- ✓ consider the possibility for oral tasks in small groups rather than the whole class

*Raise awareness, for example:*

- ✓ In consultation with the student, and the parents/carers, the relevant teacher can provide information about how to refer to SLT. You can also raise awareness amongst all staff in the school so that they know what to do that helps.

**WHAT ELSE HELPS?**

- ✓ Focus on 'what' the student is saying rather than 'how' they are saying it
- ✓ Maintain natural eye-contact to show you are listening and interested in what they are saying
- ✓ Listen and give time. Do not finish the student's word or sentence for them or move on to another student in the class before the student has finished
- ✓ Do not tell them to slow down or take a deep breath; this is unhelpful.
- ✓ Be mindful of language load; try not ask them a lot of questions at once
- ✓ If a student seems to be aware of their stammer (they clearly struggle physically, give up on what they are saying or they refer to their stammering), and parents/SLTs or the student themselves have said they would like you to say something then try acknowledging when they stammer. You might gently say "I'm really glad you persisted and said what you wanted to say" or "I'm listening" as this can take the pressure off. This should only happen when you are on a 1:1 with the student, have checked out with them whether it's what they would like you to do and do not do it every time they stammer. It can be useful to have the student complete a pupil-planning sheet that can be shared with all teachers. You can access this here: <https://michaelpalincentreforstammering.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/MPC-Suggestions-Sheet.pdf>

- ✓ We should use neutral unbiased language when talking about stammering (e.g. 'more/less' stammering, instead of saying 'better/worse' stammering).
- ✓ Scan the QR code using your phone to watch a 12-minute video called "Wait Wait I'm not finished" to hear students at the Michael Palin Centre talking about what they want teachers and education staff to know.

