

What is Stammering?



Sounds like

- Repetitions of sounds, syllables or words: I-I-I can do it.
- Prolongations: liiiiiii can do it.
- Blocking (not being able to get started): I (c)-can do it.



May look like

- Tension.
- Looking away.
- Tapping feet.
- Shaking head.



May be accompanied by

- Avoiding words or talking less.
- Negativity around talking or negative emotional reactions such as frustration, embarrassment, and anxiety.
- Reduced confidence.

- The research has shown that 5-8% of students stammer at some point. The longer a student has been stammering the less likely it is to resolve spontaneously and some families may opt to access speech and language therapy. 1% of the adult population continue to stammer.
- Stammering is a neurodevelopmental disorder. Developmental and genetic factors, such as a family history or the student's language skills, may contribute to the stammering, along with small differences in how efficiently the speech areas of the brain are working. 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 parents can do to support a student or 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 their stammering in this way you may not hear much stammering, or they may be perceived as 'quiet' by others, e.g., their teacher.
- For some students, stammering comes and goes. A student may stammer more or less depending on the particular day/time. For example they may stammer more if they are tired or unwell or when life is particularly busy.

Stammering

How to make my classroom stammer-friendly?

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.
- 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 roll-call.
- Allow extra time in oral exams.

Raise awareness, for example:

- Discuss your concerns with parents/guardians and give information about how they can refer their student 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.
- Be mindful 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 "That was a bit tricky I know, it's ok I've got time", 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. We should use neutral language when talking about stammering (e.g., 'more/less' stammering, instead of saying 'better/worse').
- Scan the QR code using your phone to watch a 12-minute video called "Wait Wait I'm not finished" to hear students and young people at the Michael Palin Centre talking about what they want teachers and education staff to know.

