

***Stammering Awareness  
Perth and Kinross Council***



**Contents**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| International Stammering Awareness Day ..... | 2 |
| What Is Stammering? .....                    | 2 |
| Types of Stammering .....                    | 3 |
| Coping Strategies .....                      | 4 |
| Talking with a Person Who Stammers .....     | 4 |
| Reasonable Adjustments.....                  | 5 |
| Sources.....                                 | 6 |

## ***International Stammering Awareness Day***

First established in 1998, International Stammering Awareness Day is observed annually on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October. It was created by the collaboration of the following organisations:

- [\*European League of Stammering Associations\*](#)
- [\*International Fluency Association\*](#)
- [\*International Stammering Association\*](#)

The day is used to bring awareness to the disorder, as well as to educate others and dispel the misconceptions that are attached to it. Each year has a theme alongside it, with 2021's being *Journey of Words: Resilience and Bouncing Back*. This topic focused on people with a stammer and the problems they have faced throughout the pandemic.

## ***What Is Stammering?***

Affecting between 1-3% of the world's population, Stammering, also commonly referred to as stuttering or dysfluency, is a communication disorder which causes the frequent disruption of speech through several different impediments. Their severity can vary from person to person but commonly can be:

- Repetition of words and sounds.
- Prolonged pronunciation of certain sounds.
- Sudden cutting-off of words.
- Trying to get the words out through making other movements such as stamping a foot, shifting of their body, and jerking of the head or clenching of their fists.

- Some actions may be done because of the embarrassment of the stammerer such as looking down or away from the person they are talking with or covering their mouth.
- In certain situations, speech may completely stop. Also known as blocking, this is when the mouth is positioned to say a word for several seconds, however little to no sound will come out. After some time, the person may be able to complete the word. When using words with repeated or prolonged sounds, the person may use interjections such as *like* or *um*. This may also occur when the person is trying to delay saying a word they expect to struggle with. Speech blocks are erratic and unpredictable; therefore, it is important to remain patient if and when it happens.

## ***Types of Stammering***

### *Developmental*

The most common type of the disorder, developmental stammers tend to appear in children around 2-4 years old. Around 8% of children will go through a period of stammering, which is thought to be related to the rapid growth of language. Research has shown that 4 out of 5 children will eventually grow out of this period, with more boys likely to have a continuing problem than girls. However, the development of the disorder may be a result of genetics, with 2 out of 3 children inheriting a stammer from older family members.

### *Acquired*

The second type of stammering is a lot less common and occurs later in life. Known as acquired stammering, it can be caused by:

- Stroke.

- A head injury.
- Neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease.
- Side effect of the prolonged use of medication or drugs.
- A result of trauma.

### Coping Strategies

People who stammer often use different techniques in order to deal with their disorder. Known as 'secondary behaviour', these can be one of or a mix of the following:

- Grimacing of the face.
- Tensing of the body, especially the neck, face, and shoulders.
- Head and body movements.
- Avoiding certain words.
- Changing what they say to something simpler.
- Avoiding certain situations.
- People who stammer may do it voluntarily so that they can get used to it.
- Claiming to forget what they were going to say when they are having difficulty getting their words out.

### ***Talking with a Person Who Stammers***

When talking with someone with a stammer, it is important to make them feel as relaxed and comfortable as possible. There are several ways to do so:

- Don't give the person advice. Saying things such as *slow down*, *relax* or *take a breath* will only make the person feel more uncomfortable than they may already do.
- Don't interrupt or speak over them.

- Give them time to finish what they are saying instead of doing it for them.
- Keep natural eye contact with them.

### ***Reasonable Adjustments***

Reasonable adjustments may be needed to help people with a stammer be more effective in their respective job roles. As they are covered under the Equality Act (2010) these adjustments must always be considered.

The changes may vary in line with a specific person's condition.

Adjustments may include:

- Work flexibility – the option to work from home on days the stammer is worse than usual.
- *Non-speaking days*, where the person may be in the office, but communication is mostly done through email or other tools which require no vocal use.
- Ability to 'talk' via email, rather than over the phone
- If the person is comfortable in making phone calls, they may feel more comfortable doing it in a place of privacy.
- During group interactions, having someone introduce everyone, rather than individuals doing it themselves.
- Additional time to speak during meeting etc.
- Avoid meetings which run back-to-back.
- Having good/excellent communication as a preferred skill within a job profile can deter people with a stammer from applying. Being specific about the communication requirements, such as its purpose and audience, will help the Council become a more inclusive employer and attract a wider range of candidates.

*Remember*, interviews can be one of the most difficult/triggering

situations for people with a stammer can go through and therefore it is important to consider reasonable adjustments as well and that how someone speaks in an interview may differ from how they speak whilst in the job.

- The rise in home working and the use of Microsoft Teams in the past year can also prove difficult. In online meetings, focus tends to be more on faces within the call and therefore people with a stammer may feel self-conscious about their face and facial movements in general.
- Staying within the problems of working from home, audio problems can cause more difficulty for people with a stammer. When the sound delays and they are asked to repeat what they said, it is common for them to change what they have said or pretend that it wasn't important as saying it will be too difficult to say it twice.
- A further problem may be the pauses a person who stammers takes when they speak can be misinterpreted by others as the person having finished talking.
- People who stammer may be quieter during online meetings due to the anxiety that comes with it. As a result, they then may feel worried or guilt about not contributing as much as others in the call.

## **Sources**

- [Scottish Stammering Network](#)
- [British Stammering Association](#)
- [Michael Palin Centre for Stammering](#)
- [NHS](#)
- [National Stuttering Association](#)