


STAM MERING AT WORK

Issue 5

Q4 '24

SUPPORT & GUIDANCE FROM STAMMA FOR TRADE UNIONS & THEIR MEMBERS



Welcome to Stammering At Work. This is a quarterly newsletter with information and resources related to stammering and the work of your union. STAMMA is a UK charity. We work with people who stammer and with those whose jobs bring them into contact with staff, customers and service users who stammer.

**EMPLOYMENT
SUPPORT SERVICE**



REG CHARITY NOS 1089967/SC038866

STAMMA

ARE YOU ASKING FOR

"Excellent communication skills"

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

The term 'excellent communication skills' is often used in job ads. Yet it can make people who stammer feel unwelcome. Framing communication skills in this way often puts us off applying, even if we have tons of expertise and experience that enables us to do the job.

What does 'excellent communication skills' actually mean? What communication skills does the job actually require? There are few jobs that require speech that is fluent 100% of the time. And communication involves far more than just speaking.

WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

It's important to define the actual communication requirements of a role in a job advert. This helps us to think about how our stammer presents itself (as everyone's is different) and if we are able to do the actual tasks involved in the role. It can also help us to consider if a reasonable adjustment could be made to facilitate the task.

Examples of defining communication requirements within job roles might include "answering the phone in a busy office environment", "creating written content for our user manuals", or "providing in-person training sessions for large groups of people".

THOSE sorts of descriptions are so much more useful than the lazy catch-all of 'excellent communication skills'.

Many people who stammer are excellent communicators by default. We've often honed a specific set of skills to allow us to communicate effectively with others. This includes:

- using positive body language
- attentive listening skills
- giving others time and space to say what they want
- broad vocabularies
- being an interesting and memorable speaker.

So don't fall into the 'excellent communication skills' trap and miss out on applications from qualified and highly-skilled people who stammer.

This is the first in a series of short articles exploring how standard recruitment and interviewing procedures may disadvantage candidates who stammer.

Each article will include recommendations for what you can do differently so that you can find the best person for the job.



GARY CLARK

TIME FOR UNIONS TO WELCOME STAMMERING

Trade unions, by their very nature, intend to welcome and help all union members, as well as encouraging them to play an active role in the union movement.

Over the years, we've seen increasing support for disabled members. That includes action such as making sure venues are accessible and including both spoken language and British Sign Language on videos. We've also seen the development of equality sections and groups for disabled members within branches and regions.

At least 1% of our members stammer. That's a lot of people. But they've rarely been considered to date. **Do union procedures create barriers for people who stammer? And, if so, what can be done?**

You'll see listed below three areas where unions' ways of working can create barriers for members who stammer...

UNION REPS' KNOWLEDGE OF STAMMERING

At least 1% of union members stammer, yet standard working practices rarely consider people who stammer. From meetings where you have to jump in verbally to be heard, to requirements to answer the phone with a scripted sentence that cannot be changed, to interview practices that fundamentally disadvantage interviewees who stammer, to icebreaker activities that humiliate people who stammer in front of their new colleagues, to mockery and bullying. These are all ways of working that can make worklife miserable for people who stammer, or limit their potential for job satisfaction and career development. But if union reps don't know anything about stammering, and don't have any knowledge of effective reasonable adjustments for people who

stammer, can they truly stand up and fulfil their role effectively for these members?

UNION MEETINGS & TRAINING COURSES

And can we honestly say that we've thought about whether our own meetings and training courses are run in ways that make people with speech differences and difficulties feel welcome and part of the group? Do we create environments where they feel safe to stammer? Where they know that teasing or mockery will not be tolerated? Or do we create environments where people who stammer might say less? Or perhaps never even join the meeting in the first place.

CONFERENCES

Union conferences can be a daunting experience for many people. When it's your first time, there are so many new people to meet, including union leaders and politicians. Hearing from a range of voices on the stage and in the sessions is part of how ideas grow and develop. But could the way we run speeches and debates be preventing some people from taking part? What if you stammer, and fundamentally need a bit longer to speak. Do you feel that you and your voice are welcome when you see the timer and the warning lights to control speech duration? Do members who stammer know they can request adjustments to those processes so they can get stuck into the debates and the speeches? So that they can become the union leaders of the future.

In upcoming issues, we'll be tackling each of these areas, providing practical tips on what you can do to make a difference. And that effect will benefit for more people than just those members who stammer. Watch this space!



A GIRL WITH GLITTER IN HER HAIR & STARS IN HER EYES

We all have stars in our eyes. And running throughout our every fiber. In fact we are all made of the same stardust: the oxygen we breathe, the calcium in our bones, iron in our blood, the carbon in our skin and brains and entangled in our very DNA — each element was once part of exploding stars long since dead. When we depart, those same elements will move on again and assume new forms.

This cosmic connection to the universe and to each other transcends personal differences. When you lose that feeling of connection but instead feel isolated and unable to communicate, then the pain can be devastating — a pain too familiar for many people who stammer — leading to “days of shame and loneliness and dashed hopes” as Neha writes in her brilliant [blog](#). If you have not read it, you must.

Among her many talents, Neha can stammer in German, English and Korean. She describes meeting an eight-year-old girl “with glitter in her hair and stars in her eyes” who also stammers. They start to talk:

I ask her what letter she struggles with the most and she says 'D'. So I teach her how to work her stammer into a long, convoluted sing-song tale about "dinner and dancing with my dear old dad and my dear dim dachshund named Dim Dim Dog", how her stammer is what makes the joke come alive in a way a fluent speaker could never do.

Connection is our natural state. Something so simple can be surprisingly difficult but there are three simple strategies that people who stammer can use to get started.

- Take small steps. Perhaps start with a single call to the STAMMA [helpline](#).
- Look for safe spaces where you feel comfortable. You might want to join a group with shared interests — for example walkers who stammer might consider [STAMMA striders](#). Or perhaps look at other [STAMMA groups and events](#).
- And if you are not accustomed to opening up, accept that it might be uncomfortable at times. That's OK, — just remember you can always step back if you need to.

If you don't stammer, it can be difficult at first to talk to someone who does. You may feel awkward and unsure what to do. For example, should you help them finish their words? This is a useful [guide](#) and the short answer is “no, don't finish someone's words for them!” You don't like being interrupted, why should they?! Simply begin with listening, talking, finding common ground while accepting difference.

The girl with glitter in her hair and stars in her eyes is still telling jokes and finishing her own words. Talking with Neha, she learnt that stammering is just another way of talking and need not hold her back. Her father says that now: “he believes his daughter will change the world”.

We are all made of stardust. Sometimes, we just need help to shine.

Jack
STAMMA

WORKSHOPS FOR UNION AFFILIATES

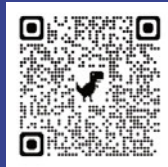
Ring **0808 802 0002** and ask someone from the Employment Support Service to call you.

Mon
3rd Feb
7pm
45 minutes

SUPPORT FOR PARENTS WITH CHILDREN WHO STAMMER

SIGN UP

8% of children stammer for at least a while, so there are lots of families out there who know what it's like. It's really common (and normal!) for parents to feel worried about stammering, what this means for their child, and unsure how they can help. If you have concerns about your child's stammering, there is lots of help and support out there. In this session, we'll give an overview of what's available. That way, you can find the best resources for you and your child.



Mon
10th Feb
1pm
60 minutes

CHAIRING INCLUSIVE MEETINGS

SIGN UP

People who stammer or have other communication differences or difficulties can find themselves talked over, missed out, or simply afraid to speak up. Their voices are worth hearing in discussions, presentations and decision-making. If your meetings are worth having, then you'll want everyone to contribute. So how do you run meetings in a way that makes people with speech differences feel welcome and able to participate? In a way that helps meetings flow and achieve what they need to? In this 45-minute session, we'll outline some of the particular challenges people with speech differences face in meetings, and provide practical tips and resources to resolve these challenges. That way, your meetings can run in ways that give more people the space to contribute.



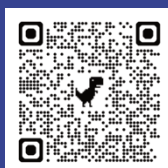
Weds
12th March
1pm
60 minutes

WORKPLACE ADJUSTMENTS FOR PEOPLE WHO STAMMER

SIGN UP

If you have concerns or questions about stammering in the workplace, this 60-minute session is for you, here will address reasonable adjustments for stammering in the workplace. In this session there'll be tips and resources on everything from interview procedures, to using the phone, intercoms or radios at work, to presentations, to meetings, to interactions with customers and colleagues,

Procedures are often set up without thought for employees who stammer. In the UK, the Equality Act and the Disability Discrimination Act (NI) put a legal obligation on organisations to make sure they are not excluding or making working like difficult for staff who stammer. Whether you stammer yourself or work with someone who stammers. This session will show you how workplaces can adapt ways of working to ensure that employees who stammer feel welcome, can thrive and can get on with their jobs.



Thurs
29th April
1pm
30 mins

WORKING WITH PATIENTS WHO STAMMER

SIGN UP

At least 1% of adults stammer, and up to 8% of children stammer for at least a while. In this 30-minute workshop, you'll find out what stammering is, and how typical ways of working may be preventing patients from communicating effectively within your healthcare setting. We'll share useful resources and tips on easy ways you can make a difference so that you can make sure the way you work is stammer-friendly!



CALL US FOR SUPPORT, INFORMATION, TRAINING & RESOURCES OR JUST TO CHAT.

WORKSHOPS FOR UNION AFFILIATES

Drop us an [email](#) and we'll get back to you.

Weds
14th May
1pm
45 minutes

UNION PROCEDURES & STAMMERING

SIGN UP

At least 1% of adults stammer so that's a lot of union members. But do your union procedures make it easy for people who stammer or those with other speech difficulties to get involved? In this 45-minute workshop, you'll find out about the challenges union members who stammer face, and how your typical ways of working may be preventing them from accessing all their member benefits or from getting actively involved in the work of the union. We'll also share useful resources and tips on easy ways you can make a difference so that you can make sure the way you work is stammer-friendly. Because these voices are worth hearing!



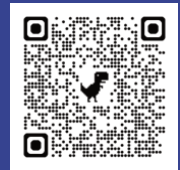
Thurs
10th July
7pm
45 minutes

SUPPORT & RESOURCES FOR ADULTS WHO STAMMER

SIGN UP

At least 1% of adults stammer. Some are really comfortable with the way they talk, whilst others find it more difficult. If you have concerns about stammering, there is lots of help and support out there.

In this 45-minute session, we'll give an overview of what's available. That way, you can think about which resources feel like the best fit for you or for someone you care about.



CALL US FOR SUPPORT, INFORMATION, TRAINING & RESOURCES OR JUST TO CHAT.

Mon
23rd June
1pm
60 minutes

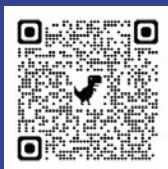
THE TELL, THE THROW & THE CATCH: A FRAMEWORK FOR DISCLOSURE

SIGN UP

Creating inclusive working environments is an important part of organisational culture. But getting employees or members to feel safe and welcome to let you know about their differences and challenges is difficult.

When someone does tell you something, it's often not easy to know how to respond.

Join us for this 60-minute session on The Tell, The Throw, and The Catch as we give you a new way to think about disclosure.



Weds
17th Sept
1pm
60 mins

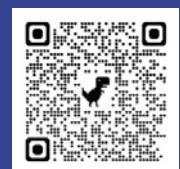
INTERVIEWING CANDIDATES WHO STAMMER

SIGN UP

If you're involved in interviewing, whether that's as part of recruitment and HR or university admissions, some of the people you interview will stammer. Procedures and ways of working in interviews are often set up without consideration for interviewees who stammer.

In the UK, the Equality Act and the Disability Discrimination Act (NI) put a legal obligation on organisations to make sure they're not disadvantaging people who stammer through their interview procedures.

In this workshop we'll outline the challenges people who stammer commonly face with standard interview practices, which can prevent them from demonstrating their skills, competence and knowledge. The session will include practical tips and resources on how you can adapt the way you interview, so that you and your interviewee can get the most out of the conversation. That way, you have the information you need to evaluate who really is the best candidate for that job or university place!



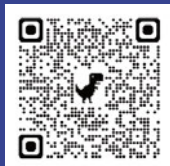
WORKSHOPS FOR UNION AFFILIATES

Tues
21st Oct
1pm
60 minutes

WORKPLACE ADJUSTMENTS FOR PEOPLE WHO STAMMER

SIGN UP

Procedures and ways of working in organisations are often set up without any thought for employees who stammer. In the UK, the Equality Act and the Disability Discrimination Act (NI) put a legal obligation on organisations to make sure they are not excluding or making working like difficult for staff who stammer. Whether you stammer yourself or work with someone who stammers, this session is full of tips and ideas. The aim is to show how workplaces can easily adapt their ways of working to ensure that employees who stammer feel welcome, can thrive and can get on with their jobs. These adaptations are called "reasonable adjustments". In STAMMA's Employment and Training Service, we're often asked for ideas for reasonable adjustments related to stammering. So if you have concerns or questions about stammering in the workplace, this 60-minute session is for you! There will be tips and resources on everything from interview procedures, to using the phone, intercoms or radios at work, to presentations, to meetings, to interactions with customers and colleagues, and much more.



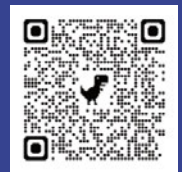
Thurs
20th Nov
1pm
30 mins

WORKING WITH CUSTOMERS & SERVICE USERS WHO STAMMER

SIGN UP

Did you know that 83% of people who stammer find it difficult to say their name on demand?

At least 1% of adults stammer. In this workshop, you'll find out what stammering is, and how typical ways of working may prevent customers and service users who stammer from using your service or organisation. We'll share useful resources and tips on easy ways you can make a difference so that the way you work is stammer-friendly!



WHAT STAMMA OFFERS

We provide support to individuals and organisations when it comes to stammering in the workplace. If a member of your union is having an issue related to stammering at work, STAMMA's Employment Service offers free consultations to your union reps and the union member to discuss the issue and explore options including reasonable adjustments, advocacy work, and training and resources for the employing organisations.

We also work directly with organisations to review and provide guidance and resources ensuring the organisation's processes and procedures are accessible for union reps, union members, staff, service users and customers who stammer.

WHAT IS STAMMERING?

Stammering is different to the occasional repetition or hesitation that everybody experiences. From a listener's perspective, stammering is when someone repeats, prolongs, or has silent pauses or blocks when they are trying to speak. There might be visible signs of effort or tension as the person works hard to get the word out. However, stammering tends to fluctuate so you might not always know that someone stammers if it's not happening much at that particular moment.

Some people work hard to make their stammer less obvious, some or all of the time to avoid negative, unhelpful reactions from others. So while you may not notice the pauses, the swapped words, the exhausting preparation in sounding fluent, or everything they are not saying, that person stammers.

CALL US FOR SUPPORT, INFORMATION, TRAINING & RESOURCES OR JUST TO CHAT.



employmentsupport@stamma.org

Drop us an email and one of our team will get back to you.



0808 802 0002

Ring and ask someone from the Employment Support Service to call you.