

Working with students who stammer

	<p>> The British Stammering Association (BSA) defines stammering as ‘a speech/fluency difficulty where the person has speech blocks, prolongations, or repetitions of sounds’. Five per cent of children will stammer at some stage during their early years and for one per cent this will continue into adulthood. It is four times more common in boys than girls. In a large lecture group it is quite likely that someone stammers.</p>
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What causes stammering?

- > There is no single cause of stammering, there is no single cure and there is no single best strategy for supporting students.
- > Current research indicates that the cause of stammering has a physiological basis in the brain structure.

How does stammering affect learning?

- > People who stammer are likely to feel a range of emotions about their verbal communications, including, frustration, embarrassment, anger and these feelings may vary over time and context.
- > Students may be withdrawn and not contribute to sessions as much as they want to.
- > They may fear the ridicule and ‘name-calling’ that they probably experienced as a child.
- > The student may have important contributions to offer but which are not made.
- > Students may not choose modules that interest them and within which they may do especially well due to an assessment pattern that relies on verbal fluency.
- > Students may feign illness to avoid situations that require verbal fluency.

How can I adapt my teaching and assessments to support a student who stammers?

In a class or lecture

- > If everyone in the group is expected to talk or comment at some stage in a session, do not leave the student who stammers to the end – it just prolongs the time during which anxiety will increase.
- > Accommodate contributions to class discussions that may be given (Continued...)

- at slightly inappropriate times or that interrupt the flow of discussion.
- > The student that stammers may have been trying for some time make the contribution.
- > Consider agreeing with the student prior to a session at what point they may want to come into a discussion.
- > Consider agreeing with the student a signal that can be used to communicate to the tutor that the student wants to say something. Don't leave them waiting. Allow them to make their point as quickly as possible without artificially interrupting the flow of discussion.

In assessed presentations

- > When presentations are part of the assessment for a module consider, in consultation with the student, any adaptations to the assessment, such as:
 - > Allow extra or less time for the presentation. Allow for and encourage the use of AVA's that the student may be able to draw upon to relieve particular moments of anxiety.
 - > Allow a group instead of an individual presentation.
 - > Allow a student to change tutorial groups so that they can work with a supportive friend.
 - > Deliver the presentation to a smaller audience.
 - > Conduct a small-group seminar round a table rather than a full stand-up presentation.
 - > Remove 'fluency' from the assessment criteria.
 - > Allow the student to video their presentation in private and then allow the students to show the video to their student group.
 - > Remove the assessment element from presentation.
 - > Accommodate the student that may talk more quickly than normal. This may be due to the desire to 'keep going' once started. For some people that stammer its getting started that's the problem; once started fluency improves, hence the desire to 'keep going' albeit too fast.
 - > Consider ignoring the 'over use' of 'filler/comfort' words or terms. Frequently used terms include, 'you know' and 'in fact'. Terms such as these can be used to start a sentence or as fillers to re-start following an incidence of dysfluency during a period of speech.
 - > Offer supportive encouragement to the student who stammers to engage in the standard learning and assessment process as fully as possible but do consider whether compulsion and the associated stress and anxiety caused is really a necessary stance to take.
 - > Do not refer to a stammer as a disability. Even though it is classified as such in certain circumstances under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Useful contacts

- >The Disability Unit,
De Montfort University, Leicester
Tel: 0116 257 7595
Email disability@dmu.ac.uk
- > The British Stammering Association,
15 Old Ford Road, London. E2 9PJ.
- T: 020 8983 1003
- E: mail@stammering.org
- W www.stammering.org

	> Further information:
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Reference material

- > **‘Stammering: A Practical Guide for Teachers and Professionals’**
Lena Rustin at al. Available from the British Stammering Association and Amazon
- > **‘The Pupil Who Stammers’** BSA leaflet
- > **‘The Adult Who Stammers’** BSA leaflet
- > **‘Recruiting and Developing Employees Who Stammer’** BSA leaflet
- > **‘Information for Teachers’**: a comprehensive guide compiled by a panel of specialist speech and language therapists. Available from http://www.stammering.org/teachers_info.html
- > **‘A Chance to Speak**: Helping a pupil who stammers- a practical guide for teachers. Available from http://www.stammering.org/chance_to_speak.html

Web sites

- > **British Stammering Association** <http://www.stammering.org>

Other related Focus On titles

- > The Impact of Stress on Learning
- > Conducting a Successful One-to-one Meeting
- > Difficult One-to-one Meetings