



# Irish Stammering Association

## What is stammering?

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**S**tammering (also called stuttering) is a neurological condition used to describe a disruption in the timing and flow of speech when someone is talking. Stammering also includes negative emotions (fear, anxiety, embarrassment) and behaviours (avoidance of speaking and speaking situations). How school staff react to stammering can have a significant impact on the person.

Developmental stammering has a genetic basis. It usually begins in childhood from ages 2-5 years and about 5% of primary children have a stammer. The latest Growing Up in Ireland study (2018) estimates that approximately 1% of the adult population is considered to stammer. This means there is likely to be 1 student who stammers for every 100 students in every school.

Stammering is often thought to be easily recognisable to the listener. However, it is as complex as it is variable. Stammering is not always as obvious as people think. Due to the avoidance of showing stammering, staff may not always realise that a student stammers. Children have reported trying to hide their stammer at school from a young age. This can present as avoiding specific words or situations. In a recent study, all adult participants reported concealing their stammer before the age of 18. The main reason for this was to protect themselves from the stigma associated with stammering. All of these factors - and the associated cognitive load - can have a significant impact on a student's ability to learn.

TRUE	FALSE
Stammering is neurophysiological and is genetic	Being shy or nervous
People who stammer know what they want to say already	Did not attend speech therapy or practise enough
Different factors affect stammering such as: competition to speak, high expectations, time pressures and stigma.	Needs to learn how to breathe properly
Variability – stammering varies day-to-day, situation-to-situation- person-to-person.	They didn't know what to say or were telling a lie

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*Stammering is neurological and should be considered the same way as dyslexia is – something that is not to be overcome, but understood and accepted.*

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*Teachers can play an important role in keeping the school environment safe and supportive for students who stammer, such as supporting a student who stammers to be a confident communicator.*

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*I used to think I should pick a job that didn't involve talking but now I know I can be anything I want to be and do anything I want to do ... whether I stammer or not. 5th year student*

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## HELPFUL PRACTICES

Listen to what the speaker is saying not how they say it

Assume a person who stammers can be successful in anything they choose to do

Good communication does not equal fluency/require fluent speech

Understand that stammering fluctuates from day-to-day and week-to-week and in different situations

Assume the student is as competent a communicator as their peers

Ask the student what would help them – advocate for them

Signpost your student to activities and events in the stammering community

Link in with the student to give them the opportunity to share their thoughts concerns and preferences

## UNHELPFUL PRACTICES

Offering advice such as "try again", "take a breath", "think about what you're going to say". Although well-intentioned, this doesn't actually help

Making negative assumptions about your student's communication or knowledge based on their stammer

Thinking that "overcoming" stammering is the only way to be successful

Rushing a student when they are reading and talking

Picking them out to talk without warning

Not taking action to deal with mocking, teasing or bullying

Not exploring accommodations and supporting the student to achieve their potential

Avoiding talking about stammering means it becomes the elephant in the room. Be sensitive but open in talking about stammering with your student

## ACCOMMODATIONS:

- Be aware of, and up to date with, RACE and DARE applications to provide accommodations for students who stammer
- Offer choices to your student in the timing of when they speak (e.g. not waiting last to present)
- Differentiation: Classroom-based presentations could be done in a small group or 1:1 with a teacher. The aim should be to build confidence for the pupil to present more comfortably
- Diversity and inclusion: consider an SPHE class on how to support difference
- Encourage students who stammer to pursue their interests and career aspirations

## GROUPWORK / PRESENTATIONS

- Give consideration to written work
- Offer more time
- Provide smaller group collaboration
- Many students are nervous of presenting. However, research shows this is considerably more stressful when you stammer

## SOURCES OF SUPPORT

The Irish Stammering Association has created a number of supports specifically for teens who stammer. We have a series of workshops addressing the needs of Teens called 'Stammering and...'

ISA has regular support groups for young children and teenagers who stammer as well as parents and families. Upcoming events for young people include our kids 8-12

and teenage support groups, as well as our newly launched gaming club. We have specific talks for teens such as *"Stammering and anxiety"* and *"Stammering and oral exams"*. This year ISA also celebrates 10 years of *Walk and Talk* events – an informal opportunity to come along and chat on a weekend stroll. All our events are free to attend and all are welcome. Full details are on the ISA website.

The ISA also has a number of support groups, Education and Employment Support, as well as offering an outreach service. If you would like the ISA to deliver a talk on how to support someone who stammers to teachers or peer groups, please get in touch.

Our website has all the information and resources you will need. You can also follow us on social media or on our new podcast series

Irish Stammering Association – Home | Facebook

stammeringireland • Instagram photos and videos



SCAN ME



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