

Reasonable accommodations in the workplace

Talking to an employee or team member who stutters

If your employee has already mentioned their stutter to you, it's likely that they're open to discussing it. For others, when you bring it up, just be mindful—not everyone's comfortable talking about their stutter. Communicating with empathy and openness will help them to realise that you're there to help.

Considerations for talking to your employee or team member who stutters

- Have a private chat with your employee, making sure they feel comfortable and at ease.
- Introduce the subject sensitively, e.g., you might say, "Hey, when you have a chance, could we chat in private? I noticed some things, like how you handle [mention specific observations, e.g., speaking in meetings, answering the phone], and I wanted to see if there's any way we can support you more at work."
- Stay open to hearing their perspective—it might be different from what you expected, and that's ok.
- Respect how your employee responds; they might not be ready to discuss their stutter or may feel uncomfortable opening up about it at first.

Reasonable Accommodations

We've put together a list of common workplace situations that people who stutter might find challenging. Alongside these, we've included some suggestions on how you can support your employee or team member who stutters. Remember, this list isn't exhaustive—there's always room to explore more accommodations that suit their needs and the unique environment of your workplace.

When you provide accommodations that cater to the unique needs of your employee or team member, you're helping them feel more at ease and confident in their roles. This support enables them to show their true potential and contribute effectively to the team.

Introductions

For people who stutter, saying their own name can be especially tough. It's a word that can't easily be changed or skipped, which can add to the challenge, especially in situations like introductions where there's often a bit of time pressure.

- Rather than having them introduce themselves, consider having the chair introduce everyone
- Agree beforehand on the order of introductions, i.e. whether they prefer to go first or last
- Utilise written names or the chat function in online meetings for introductions
- For larger group meetings, consider using name tags as an additional aid

Workplace accommodations cont.

Phone Calls

Phone calls can pose challenges for people who stutter. Without visual cues, the person on the other end may mistake pauses or stutters as connection issues, potentially not allowing enough time for clear communication to happen.

- Provide a quiet or private space for making phone calls
- Agree to modify or flexibly use prepared greetings and scripts
- Allow the option of using emails and text messages for communication
- Consider setting up an automated message for answering the phone

Presentations

Speaking in front of a group, whether it's a small or a large audience, can be daunting for anyone. However, for people who stutter, this situation can be particularly challenging and anxiety-inducing. Some may feel compelled to avoid speaking in public altogether, requiring patient support and time to help bolster their confidence.

- Consider co-presenting with another colleague to share the speaking load
- Use written slides or handouts to complement verbal presentations
- Encourage the person who stutters to present on topics they are most familiar and confident with.
- Have another person introduce them before they speak
- Pre-record the presentation and make it available online

Meetings

People who stutter often worry that their contributions might be seen as less valid or that their confidence is being questioned if they stutter. Even in comfortable settings where others are aware of their stutter, meetings can still present challenges. Quick interruptions and rapid turn-taking can make it difficult for people who stutter to fully participate and express their thoughts.

In-person meetings:

- The meeting host can ensure everyone gets a chance to speak uninterrupted and encourage everyone to indicate non-verbally when they want to speak
- Send out a meeting agenda beforehand so people who stutter can indicate their interest in speaking and feel more prepared
- Allow contributions in writing before and after the meeting to ensure everyone's thoughts are included

Online meetings:

- Utilise the 'hand up' function for signalling when someone wants to speak
- Provide ample time for responses and questions, and pause for 5-10 seconds before moving on to the next topic to allow plenty of time for the person who stutters to begin talking