

# STAMMAM ERING

Issue 2  
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# AT WORK



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.

# BREAKING THE ICE WITHOUT BREAKING THE PERSON

Jack Nicholas

**People who stammer often find saying their name, making introductions, and taking part in icebreakers particularly challenging. And they are not alone in this. What can we do to make life easier for everyone?**

Like most of us, I have mixed memories of my school days. Some good: I made good friends and was lucky enough to have a couple of inspirational teachers. But also some bad, and the worst of these are the flashbacks to sitting at a desk, waiting for your turn to shout out your name for the morning register. As I waited, stomach churning, trying to predict what tricks my stammer would play on me that day, I would say to myself, "When I leave school, I will never have to do this ever again."

Well, that didn't turn out how I hoped. Work is a never ending round of introductions, and it gets worse — on special days, as a special treat, there is the dreaded icebreaker.

Icebreaker? Come on. I mean, ice is treacherous

stuff. The home of the razor-tusked walrus and 1000 kilo polar bear. Breaking ice requires a massive ship with multiple engines and a double-skinned hull of super-strength steel. And I am expected to smile and chatter (stammer) my way through it?

**There has to be a better way... And in fact, there are several.**

**First**, enshrined in the Equality Act 2010 and the Disability Discrimination Act (NI), there are "reasonable adjustments". A reasonable adjustment is agreed between the individual and the organisation. So, instead of saying my name, I might ask to use an on-screen background that has my name and a caption letting others know that I stammer during video calls. Or I might use a pre-recorded message during phone calls. STAMMA has in-depth guides to reasonable adjustments with many suggestions for different work situations.

**Secondly**, your organisation might want to go a step further and embrace the spirit of the law instead of

just using reasonable adjustments to meet minimum legal requirements. This involves thinking about stammering and other communication issues as part of a bigger journey towards an inclusive and accessible working culture. Often, this leads to rethinking how best to work together. Do we really need to waste time during a meeting on introductions most of us will forget as soon as said? Why not circulate written one-page profiles before the meeting? A little more upfront work but massively more useful in the long run.

This approach of thinking inclusively and having a different approach to introductions and icebreakers won't only help people who stammer. It might be seized gratefully by many others: people with hearing impairments, people for whom English is a second language, those of us with introvert personalities, the neurodiverse community.

As so often in society, the disadvantaged are those who lead the fight for change and progress.

We are not little children trying to survive in an antiquated school system. We have modern workplaces, modern technology, and a new awareness of the need for a diverse and equitable working environment. We can do better than sticking unthinkingly to traditional, one-size-fits-all approaches to introductions and icebreakers.

*Jack*



# SPOTLIGHT ON

## Support for Families

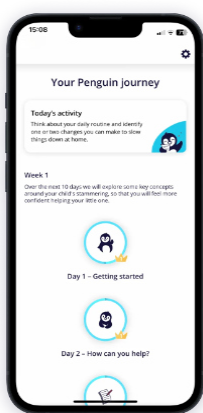
The most common age for stammering to make its first appearance is between the ages of 2-5 years. In fact, 1 in 12 children in that age group stammer. So if you're a parent trying to get to grips with a sudden change in your child's way of talking, you're not alone. When stammering starts, it's not unusual for parents to find themselves feeling worried about why this has happened, what it means and what they should do. Some children are distressed by their stammering and may start saying less, whilst other children aren't bothered at all and continue chattering away.

However you're feeling about it, you're not alone. And if you or your young child are worried, there's lots of support out there from apps to workshops, support groups, and Speech & Language Therapy. We've outlined below the easiest way to access some of this support.

### Penguin app

Specifically designed for the parents of preschool children who stammer, this FREE app provides a 10-day programme, with a few minutes of information and resources each day, to help you support your child.

See [benetalk.com/penguin](https://benetalk.com/penguin) for more details.



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### Speech & Language Therapy

You can also contact your local NHS Speech & Language Therapy department or a private Speech & Language Therapist for guidance. For your local NHS service, type your town name then "Speech and Language Therapy NHS children" into an internet search tool. For private Speech & Language Therapy, see [asltip.com](https://asltip.com).

For more information about STAMMA's family support programmes, please contact STAMMA on 0808 808 0002 or email them at [help@stamma.org](mailto:help@stamma.org).

### Workshops

The charity STAMMA run free online workshops for parents of children who stammer. The workshops are led by specialist Speech & Language Therapists. See [stamma.org/get-help/workshops](https://stamma.org/get-help/workshops) for more info.

### Parent groups

STAMMA also run free online support groups where parents with children who stammer can meet other parents to share and learn from one another including experiences, and ideas about what they've found helpful. See here for more info: [stamma.org/get-help/parent-2-parent-stammering-support-groups](https://stamma.org/get-help/parent-2-parent-stammering-support-groups).

# LESSONS FROM EMPLOYMENT TRIBUNALS

## The Value of Informing Employers of Disability

Claimant 'A' v Pennine Care Foundation Trust

### Overview

The claimant in the case of A V Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust stammers. The claimant worked at a hospital where their role involved taking a phonecalls calls from patients. The claimant sometimes found phonecalls challenging in relation to stammering and had the following reasonable adjustments in place:

- **Started by dealing with a limited number of calls, which was gradually increased over time**
- **Could choose not to answer a call if he didn't feel comfortable doing so**
- **Access to a private space to take calls rather than having to take calls in front of colleagues**

All the reasonable adjustments remained available to the claimant, but as time progressed, he felt less need to use them.

When the claimant applied for a job with a different NHS Trust - Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust - he indicated that he was disabled on the application form. At the interview, it was clear that the claimant stammered. The new role would involve more complex phone calls. Reasonable adjustments were not discussed during the job interview.

After the claimant was offered the job, he mentioned the reasonable adjustments he currently has in place. After this conversation, the job offer was withdrawn. Pennine Care claimed they couldn't accommodate the requested adjustments.

This case ended up in front of an Employment Tribunal where it was successful, greatly influenced by the fact

that Pennine Care was aware of the claimant's disability before they offered him the job and subsequently withdrew the offer.

Whilst the tribunal rejected part of the claim, it upheld the claim of discrimination arising from disability. The tribunal agreed that withdrawing the job offer was unfavourable treatment under the Equality Act.



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### What should the employer have done differently?

The tribunal ruled that Pennine Care Trust breached Section 15 of the Equality Act because they could not prove that the withdrawal of the job offer was a "proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim". In this case, the "legitimate aim" was employing someone to carry out the role in the environment and circumstances in which Pennine Care operated.

In this case, Pennine Care Trust could not prove that withdrawing the job offer was proportionate. Instead, the tribunal reviewed all the adjustments the claimant

had suggested. They highlighted the following options that the employer should have considered rather than withdrawing the job offer:

- **A trial period**
- **An enhanced induction to familiarise the claimant with his colleagues & working environment**
- **Where available, the provision of a free office as a private space for taking calls**

## What do we learn from this case?

The fact that the claimant had made his disability known to Pennine Care Trust meant they had limited or no defence when they chose to withdraw the job offer rather than consider reasonable adjustments or a trial period. This is a very practical demonstration of how disclosure of disability can be to the benefit of an employee or job candidate. Once an employer is aware of the disability they have a legal obligation to adjust their standard ways of working where possible.

## 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 say sounds and words. 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. Also, 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.

## WHAT STAMMA OFFERS

Our aim as part of the employment support service is to provide support to both individuals and organisations when it comes to thinking about stammering and the workplace. If a member of your union is having an issue related to stammering at work, STAMMA's Employment Service offer 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.

**DO REACH OUT TO US FOR SUPPORT, INFORMATION, TRAINING & RESOURCES OR JUST TO CHAT.**



**employmentsupport@stamma.org**

Drop us an email at a time convenient to you and one of our team will get back to you.



**0808 802 0002**

Give us a call and ask someone from the Employment Support Service to call you back.



# WORKSHOPS

Here's the 2024 programme of online workshops for our union affiliates. These workshops are free to members and reps of affiliated branches. Please click 'MORE' for more information, or to register for each workshop.

**18<sup>TH</sup>  
APRIL  
'24**

## **REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS AT WORK FOR PEOPLE WHO STAMMER**

Thursday, 7pm, 1 hour

**MORE**

**14<sup>TH</sup>  
MAY  
'24**

## **SUPPORT AND RESOURCES FOR ADULTS WHO STAMMER**

Tuesday, 1pm, 45 minutes

**MORE**

**10<sup>TH</sup>  
JUNE  
'24**

## **CHAIRING INCLUSIVE MEETINGS**

Monday, 1pm, 45 minutes

**MORE**

**11<sup>TH</sup>  
JULY  
'24**

## **WORKING WITH CUSTOMERS AND SERVICE USERS WHO STAMMER**

Thursday, 11am, 30 minutes

**MORE**

**23<sup>RD</sup>  
SEPTEMBER  
'24**

## **SUPPORT FOR PARENTS WITH CHILDREN WHO STAMMER**

Monday, 7pm, 45 minutes

**MORE**

**22<sup>ND</sup>  
OCTOBER  
'24**

## **UNION PROCEDURES AND STAMMERING**

Tuesday, 1pm, 1 hour

**MORE**

**22<sup>ND</sup>  
NOVEMBER  
'24**

## **REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS AT WORK FOR PEOPLE WHO STAMMER**

Friday, 1pm, 1 hour

**MORE**