

PHONE CALL NIGHTMARES

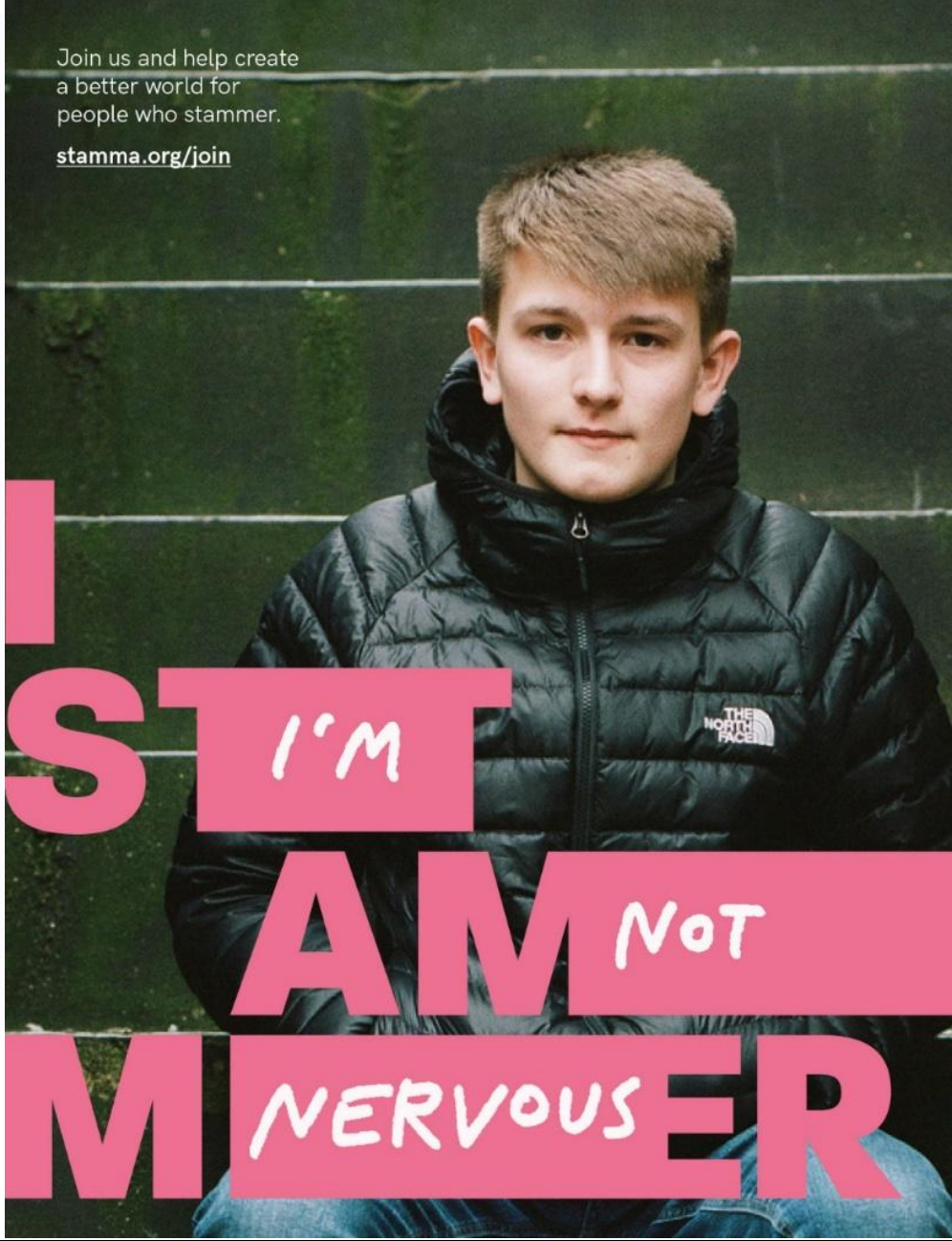
STAMMA



WHAT IS STAMMERING?

Someone who stammers may repeat, prolong or get stuck on sounds or words some or all of the time. There may be signs of physical effort as the person works to get a word out.

- It's a speech difference
- It's physical and it fluctuates
- It can start at any age
- Loads of people stammer
- Some people mask their stammering



What's stammering like for you?

WHAT IS STAMMERING?

Perhaps one of the most frustrating things about stammering is that the difficulty is not always visible to others. They don't see the mental gymnastics in the background. They don't see the words abandoned and replaced. They don't see the routes around difficult words and sounds. They don't see the anxiety that can build before a phone call, a meeting, a conversation or an introduction. And they don't see the relief when a conversation ends, and you managed to get through it.

Stammering isn't just about dysfluent speech. It's also about being believed, being understood, being given time, being treated with dignity, and being heard.

Tazneem, 2026

2025 REPORT ON PHONE ACCESSIBILITY

A survey of the experiences of 356 people who stammer



65% OF CALLERS FACED BARRIERS

- Had their words guessed or assumed, 32%
- Talked over, 31%
- Hit IVR* issues, 24%
- Hung up on, 14%
- Laughed at, 5%
- Misinterpreted as a bad line, 4%

*IVR : Interactive Voice Response system



WHAT CALLERS TOLD US

"IVR calls asking for numbers or codes are a nightmare."

"It was an automated system that, because I couldn't say what I wanted quickly enough, they pushed me around their system, time and again."

"Trying to guess what I am saying, talking over me, talking slowly as if it is my understanding that is the problem."

"They started saying in a loud voice 'you are breaking up'. When I said 'no I stammer please just listen', she kept saying in a very very firm voice 'how can I help you' multiple times."

"[They] laughed and asked if I was ill."

"On some points they completely misunderstood and just assumed that I was going to say something else."

"I was blocking on my name and the agent laughed and said 'have you forgotten your own name...'"

"I struggle with my name as I cannot navigate around it... I felt she thought I was stupid."

"..it's more how it makes me feel having to relay things such as my name, address, date of birth (key information and having to say it on demand rather than natural flow of a conversation)."

How do you feel about making phonecalls?

How do you feel about making phonecalls?

RECOMMENDATIONS

START OF THE CALL

It's common for people who stammer to find they can't speak immediately when calls begin.

STAMMA has scripts you can use and adapt for your calls.

KEYWORDS

It's common for people who stammer to find saying keywords like name, date of birth, account number, postcode etc, hard. Words you can't change or substitute.

Train call handlers to expect this.

TECHNICAL SYSTEMS

Two areas to consider

1. Speech analytics systems, IVR and AI:
   - talk time limits
   - Error rates and hallucinations
   - lack of escape routes
2. Record flagging

DEALING WITH 'BAD LINES' OR SILENCE

Don't jump in with lots of extra questions. Instead, try: **"Take the time you need. I'm listening".**

After 30 seconds, if you're feeling really unsure and want to try something else, say this:
"I can't hear you and I'm not sure if you can hear me or not. If you'd like me to stay on the line, can you tap on your phone twice, just so that I know you're there?"

Or, if you still haven't heard anything from your caller, it's OK to move towards ending the call. But make sure you explain and make the caller feel welcome to call you back:

I'm not sure if you're there and want to talk to us or not. I can't hear you and I'm not sure you can hear me, so I'm going to finish the call now, but you're very welcome to call us back. If the phone is difficult for you and you'd prefer to chat in a different way, you can also contact us by (outline alternative contact methods). Thank you for calling and we really hope to chat with you next time. Bye."

The challenge of keywords

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Location unclear from audio

Need city or area name

Ready to check forecast

Tap anywhere to interrupt

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CALLER PROMPT

"If speaking's not always easy for you and you'd like the person taking your call to know that, please press 1."



What does and doesn't help?

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