

# JAN

Job Accommodation Network

Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

## Accommodation and Compliance Series

# Accommodation and Compliance Series: Employees who Stutter

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Funded by a contract with the Office of Disability  
Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor

## Preface

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JAN does not endorse or recommend any products or services mentioned in this publication. Although every effort is made to update resources, JAN encourages contacting product manufacturers/vendors and service providers directly to ensure that they meet the intended purposes. This guarantees that the most up-to-date information is obtained.

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## **JAN'S Accommodation and Compliance Series**

### **Introduction**

JAN's Accommodation and Compliance Series is designed to help employers determine effective accommodations and comply with Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Each publication in the series addresses a specific medical condition and provides information about the condition, ADA information, accommodation ideas, and resources for additional information.

The Accommodation and Compliance Series is a starting point in the accommodation process and may not address every situation. Accommodations should be made on a case by case basis, considering each employee's individual limitations and accommodation needs. Employers are encouraged to contact JAN to discuss specific situations in more detail.

For information on assistive technology and other accommodation ideas, visit JAN's Searchable Online Accommodation Resource (SOAR) at <http://askjan.org/soar>.

### **Information about Stuttering**

According to the Stuttering Foundation of America (SFA), over three million people in the United States stutter. Males are affected by stuttering four times more than females. When someone stutters the flow of speech can be interrupted by repetitions, prolongations, or periods where no sound is produced during the person's effort to communicate. The person may also exhibit unusual facial and body movements while trying to speak.

There is no single cause of stuttering but current research is focusing on neurological causes. Stuttering is not caused by an emotional or nervous disorder. Some individuals who stutter can benefit from stuttering therapy and the use of fluency aids. The National Stuttering Association (NSA) indicates that adults who stutter may benefit from stuttering therapy to help their speech but that on-going maintenance may be needed to manage continued fluency.

An article written by William D. Parry, Chair of the NSA Advocacy Committee, states "Of the many obstacles faced by people who stutter perhaps the most devastating is discrimination in employment and educational opportunities." Parry also notes that people who stutter are subject to negative stereotypes that prevent them from obtaining employment and promotional opportunities. According to Parry, common stereotypes include, "the widely accepted impression that stutterers are nervous, shy, quiet, self-conscious, withdrawn, tense, anxious, fearful, reticent, and guarded."

Individuals who stutter can be highly qualified and capable workers if provided the chance to get their foot in the door. People who stutter are encouraged to talk about

their stuttering with their employers to dispel stereotypes. Information about workplace accommodations may also be helpful.

### **Application and Interview-Information for the Employer:**

- Be patient and listen
- Do not complete words or sentences for the individual
- Maintain conversational eye contact and focus on the content of communication rather than the delivery of the communication
- Relax and communicate as you would normally
- Provide interview questions in advance if possible to allow the individual time to prepare and deliver responses effectively
- Consider offering a personal interview as an alternative to a phone interview
- Become knowledgeable about stuttering

### **Application and Interview-Information for the Individual:**

- Talk with the employer about stuttering and how it may impact job performance and provide suggestions for accommodations that may alleviate performance concerns (organizations such as the SFA and the NSA suggest that people who stutter should be open about their speaking abilities)
- Provide an informative cover letter and resume or vita to be used as marketing tools; market yourself and sell your abilities
- Be prepared for the interview by researching typical interview questions, preparing answers, and rehearsing prior to interview
- Request a personal interview if a telephone interview is scheduled but a personal interview would be more effective
- Plan in advance to use techniques and strategies that you have learned in speech therapy or support groups and that you find helpful in managing stuttering

### **On the Job:**

- Talk with co-workers and clients about stuttering to educate them and ease their anxiety about communicating
- Use techniques and strategies that you have learned in speech therapy or support groups and that you find helpful in managing stuttering
- Try the following if using the telephone is difficult:

- When making calls, be prepared; know what needs to be said before dialing and write the main points down; use a script when applicable
- Rehearse the call with someone else
- Do not procrastinate; procrastination will only prolong anxiety and make the situation more stressful
- Answer telephone calls when ready and focus on the call, not on distractions around you
- Be prepared with easy ways to answer the telephone: “Hello this is Jim,” “Mary speaking,” “Good morning/afternoon,” etc.
- Practice using the telephone as often as possible
- Be prepared and be concise when speaking in public and get right to the point
- Use electronic communication options such as e-mail and instant messaging
- Use fluency aids if effective and seek out therapy options
- Be confident (SFA states that “Fluent speech breeds confidence, and confidence breeds fluent speech”)

## **Stuttering and the Americans with Disabilities Act**

The ADA does not contain a list of medical conditions that constitute disabilities. Instead, the ADA has a general definition of disability that each person must meet. A person has a disability if he/she has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having an impairment. For more information about how to determine whether a person has a disability under the ADA, see [How to Determine Whether a Person Has a Disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act \(ADAAA\)](#).

## **Accommodating Employees with Stuttering**

People who stutter may develop some of the limitations discussed below, but seldom develop all of them. Also, the degree of limitation will vary among individuals. Be aware that not all people who stutter will need accommodations to perform their jobs and many others may only need a few accommodations. The following is only a sample of the possibilities available. Numerous other accommodation solutions may exist.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. What limitations is the employee experiencing?

2. How do these limitations affect the employee and the employee's job performance?
3. What specific job tasks are problematic as a result of these limitations?
4. What accommodations are available to reduce or eliminate these problems? Are all possible resources being used to determine possible accommodations?
5. Has the employee been consulted regarding possible accommodations?
6. Once accommodations are in place, would it be useful to meet with the employee to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodations and to determine whether additional accommodations are needed?
7. Do supervisory personnel and employees need training?

### **Accommodation Ideas:**

#### **Limitations**

##### Stuttering Speech Disfluency

- Flexible Schedule
- Fluency Devices
- Job Restructuring

#### **Work-Related Functions**

##### Stress

- Apps for Anxiety and Stress
- Behavior Modification Techniques
- Counseling/Therapy
- Flexible Schedule
- Job Restructuring
- Marginal Functions
- Modified Break Schedule
- Monitor Mirrors
- On-site Mentoring
- Service Animal
- Simulated Skylights and Windows
- Supervisory Methods

- Support Animal
- Support Person
- Telework, Work from Home, Working Remotely
- Uninterrupted Work Time

## **Situations and Solutions:**

**A professor with stuttering experienced an exacerbation of his condition and needed to start attending speech therapy on a weekly basis to manage his symptoms.**

He asked that his course schedule be modified, so that he could change one of his courses to an online format, and have his other classes and office hours scheduled around his therapy sessions for the duration on the next semester. The employee modified the professor's teaching schedule.

**A computer programmer with stuttering found communication by telephone to be particularly difficult.**

He asked that when face-to-face interactions were not possible, his supervisor utilize e-mail and instant messaging instead of the telephone and that he also be allowed to use these methods of communication with his coworkers. The employer agreed.

**A new hire at a call center had a history of stuttering.**

He experienced an exacerbation of his symptoms during the first few weeks on the job. He had previously found delayed auditory feedback systems to be helpful in managing his stuttering. He requested that his employer purchase a delayed auditory feedback device and headset that would be compatible with the calls center's phone system.

**A new hire with stuttering became concerned when he realized that he would have to lead a presentation after a few months on the job.**

He requested a modified schedule so that he could meet with a speech language pathologist to address the issue in speech therapy, the employer provided a modified schedule.

**A user support specialist with stuttering used the TTY relay service as a backup means of communication at times when she found it difficult to speak on the telephone.**

She became concerned about the confidentiality of this communication method and called JAN. A JAN consultant explained the FCC's confidentiality requirements for relay service providers, suggested that she contact the FCC directly for additional information, and discussed speech generating devices for use with the telephone as a potential alternative.

**A prospective employer contacted an applicant to let her know that she had been selected to move on to the next stage of the application process which involved an interview by telephone.**

The applicant disclosed that she was a person with stuttering and asked if it would be possible to do the interview face-to-face. The employer did not feel able to offer an in person interview, but offered the alternatives of an interview via video chat or via instant messaging.



## Products

There are numerous products that can be used to accommodate people with limitations. JAN's Searchable Online Accommodation Resource at <http://askjan.org/soar> is designed to let users explore various accommodation options. Many product vendor lists are accessible through this system; however, JAN provides these lists and many more that are not available on the Web site upon request. Contact JAN directly if you have specific accommodation situations, are looking for products, need vendor information, or are seeking a referral.

## Resources

### **Job Accommodation Network**

West Virginia University  
PO Box 6080  
Morgantown, WV 26506-6080  
Toll Free: (800) 526-7234  
TTY: (304) 293-7186  
Fax: (304) 293-5407  
jan@askjan.org  
<http://AskJAN.org>

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a free consulting service that provides information about job accommodations, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the employability of people with disabilities.

### **Office of Disability Employment Policy**

200 Constitution Avenue,  
NW, Room S-1303  
Washington, DC 20210  
Toll Free: (866) 633-7365  
odep@dol.gov  
<http://dol.gov/odep>

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) is an agency within the U.S. Department of Labor. ODEP provides national leadership to increase employment opportunities for adults and youth with disabilities while striving to eliminate barriers to employment.

**American Board of Fluency and Fluency Disorders**

563 Carter Court,  
Suite B  
Kimberly, WI 54136  
Direct: (920) 750-7720  
Fax: (920) 882-3655  
info@stutteringspecialists.org  
<http://www.stutteringspecialists.org>

This website is designed to help consumers and professionals locate speech-language pathologists who are Board Recognized Specialists in Fluency Disorders: professionals who have gone beyond the basic clinical certification (CCC-SLP) awarded by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA).

**American Speech-Language-Hearing Association**

2200 Research Blvd  
Rockville, MD 20850-3289  
Toll Free: (800) 638-8255  
Direct: (301) 296-5700  
Fax: (301) 296-8580  
<http://www.asha.org>

ASHA promotes the interests of, and provide the highest quality services for, professions in audiology, speech-language pathology, and speech and hearing science; and an advocate for people with communication disabilities.

**Mayo Clinic**

13400 E. Shea Blvd.  
Scottsdale, AZ 85259  
Direct: (480) 301-8000  
<http://www.mayoclinic.org/>

The Mayo Clinic's mission to inspire hope and contribute to health and well-being by providing the best care to every patient through integrated clinical practice, education and research.

**MedlinePlus**

8600 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, MD 20894  
custserv@nlm.nih.gov  
<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/>

MedlinePlus is the National Institutes of Health's Web site for patients and their families and friends. Produced by the National Library of Medicine, the world's largest medical library, it brings you information about diseases, conditions, and wellness issues in language you can understand. MedlinePlus offers reliable, up-to-date health information, anytime, anywhere, for free.

Created by the U.S. National Library of Medicine

**National Center for Biotechnology Information**

8600 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, MD 20894  
pubmedcentral@ncbi.nlm.nih.gov  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>

MISSION: IMS brings together an international community of health care professionals, researchers, educators, and others to improve care and transform delivery of treatment to those suffering from soft tissue pain through the promotion and exchange of globally recognized research, education, and innovation in patient care.

**National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders**

31 Center Drive  
MSC 2320  
Bethesda, MD 20892  
Toll Free: (800) 241-1044  
nidcdinfo@nidcd.nih.gov  
<http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

National Resource center for health information about hearing, balance, smell, taste, voice, speech, and language for health professionals, patients, industry, and the public.

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