

What *not* to say to someone who stammers

1. Read the short text below about stammering. Does anything surprise you?

Stammering (sometimes referred to as 'stuttering') means that when you speak you get stuck on certain words or sounds, or that you repeat sounds. It usually starts in early childhood, but some people grow out of it. There is no one reason why people stammer, but recent research suggests that it is genetic. Around one person in every hundred stammers.

2. Do you ever stammer or know anyone that stammers? How do you think you should respond when someone stammers?

3. Read the text below, written by Joe who has a stammer, and compare with your ideas.



I have a stammer, or, if you're American, a stutter. Can I just say straightaway that I wish people wouldn't assume that because I stammer I must be stupid. Stammering has absolutely nothing to do with intelligence.

People who have a stammer aren't doing it because they feel nervous, so I'd rather people didn't try and make me feel better. I really don't need them to give me advice, such as 'slow down' or 'breathe'.

Another pet hate of mine is when someone thinks they're an expert in stammering because they've seen a film where a character had a stammer. It's even more annoying when they tell me I can be cured by, for example, singing. Am I supposed to sing to people instead of talk?

I'd also really prefer people not to finish my sentence for me – especially when you get it wrong and that wasn't what I was trying to say at all. And please don't pressure me. Telling me to 'just spit it out' isn't exactly helpful either.

Finally, I'd sooner people didn't ask me what happened to me to make me stammer. Sometimes a stammer can be triggered by trauma, but most of the time there's no particular reason for it. It's just part of what makes me who I am.

I guess what I'm really saying is that I'd prefer people to focus on what I'm saying, rather than how I'm saying it.

4a. What five ways of responding to stammering does Joe find unhelpful or annoying?

What would he prefer people to do when he's speaking?

4b. Why do you think people often respond to stammering in these ways? What do you think are the best ways of helping to understand more about stammering, and how to respond when someone stammers?

5. Find the following ways of expressing preference in the text and complete them using Joe's words.

1. I wish people...
2. I'd rather people...
3. I'd prefer people...
4. I'd sooner people...
5. I'd prefer people... rather...

6a. Read the grammar rules and complete them with the correct verb from the box. You can use each word several times. Use the examples from the text in exercise 5 to help you.

prefer rather sooner wish

Expressing preference

There are several different ways of expressing preference and the verb patterns vary.

1 Subject + would + ¹ _____ + object + full infinitive (+ ² _____ + than + bare infinitive)

I'd ³ _____ you (not) to arrive early.

I'd ⁴ _____ you to arrive early ⁵ _____ than be late.

2 Subject + would + ⁶ _____ or ⁷ _____ + object + past tense or Subject + would + ⁸ _____ + bare infinitive.

I'd ⁹ _____ you didn't do that. / I'd ¹⁰ _____ you didn't do that.

I'd ¹¹ _____ not do that.

3 Subject + ¹² _____ + object + would(n't) + bare infinitive

I ¹³ _____ he wouldn't leave his socks on the floor.

6b. Which form is used to express some annoyance as well as a preference?

7. Complete the second sentence so that it means the same as the first, using the word in CAPITALS.

1 Please don't shout. YOU

I'd rather _____

2 I don't want him to buy me presents all the time. SOONER

I'd _____

3 Lucy would rather go to the cinema than the theatre. RATHER

Lucy would prefer _____

4 I'd really rather you didn't whistle all the time. WOULDN'T

I _____

5 I really fancy eating Chinese food tonight. PREFER

I'd _____

6 They would sooner you didn't use your mobile at the dinner table. WISH

They _____

7 I don't really want to go out tonight. RATHER

I'd _____

8a. Working in pairs, make a list of 5–10 things other people sometimes do that you find annoying. For example, interrupting you when you're speaking.

8b. For each example in your list, write 2 different ways of saying that you would prefer them to behave differently. E.g. I'd rather you didn't interrupt me when I'm speaking/ I'd prefer you not to interrupt me when I'm speaking.