



The Communication Trust
Every child understood



Let's talk about it

What new teachers need to know about children's communication skills

Why should you read this booklet?

Almost everything we do involves speech, language and / or communication. Everyday tasks, having a conversation, making friends, sorting out problems and having fun all rely on our ability to communicate. Crucially, speech, language and communication are also essential skills for enabling children and young people to learn.

Being able to say what you want and to understand what others are saying are the most important skills we need in life. Yet many people take communication for granted. For some children and young people, communicating with others is difficult and they have speech, language and communication needs – SLCN.

Teachers have a number of crucial roles in supporting children and young people's communication. This short booklet has been written for people who are training to be teachers. It outlines the importance of communication at school, provides information about SLCN and highlights your roles, as well as signposting you to further sources of information.



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What are speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)?

Speech, language and communication develop gradually, based on good attention, listening and play skills. They develop throughout childhood and continue through adolescence.

Why are speech, language and communication skills important?

Speech, language and communication skills are the building blocks for learning. Children use their knowledge of sounds in learning to read and spell. They use the words they know to understand what they hear, to share what they think and to ask questions. These words and concepts are vital for making sense of new information or ideas that they are finding out about. Children and young people's interactions at school with adults and their peers are crucial in supporting their learning.

There's much research evidence which shows the links between oral language skills and:

- Literacy skills¹
- Social and emotional development²
- Behaviour³
- Attainment – oral language skills such as vocabulary knowledge and narrative or story-telling skills have been shown to be strong predictors of academic success⁴

Additionally, language is often the medium of teaching and learning in schools. How much do you say to your pupils when you teach a lesson? How much can you explain without using language? What role does language play in your pupils showing you what they know and have learned? How do pupils use language as a tool for learning – to clarify, extend or consolidate ideas?

As well as being vital for learning, speech, language and communication skills are essential across the school day - for pupils to make friends, sort out problems and share experiences.

So, we can see how important speech, language and communication skills are for all the children and young people you will teach. For pupils with SLCN, there are additional and significant challenges.

1 Hartshorne, M. (2006) *Speech, language and Communication Needs and Literacy Difficulties*, I CAN Talk series paper 1

2 Rose, J. (2006) *Rose Review into the teaching of reading*

3 Hart, K.I., Fujiki, M., Brinton, B., Hart, C.H. (2004) *The relationship between social behavior and severity of language impairment*

4 Feinstein, L., and Duckworth, K. (2006) *Development in the early years: its importance for school performance and adult outcomes*, London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Institute of Education, University of London

Speech refers to speaking with a clear voice, in a way that makes speech sound interesting and meaningful. Speaking without hesitating too much or without repeating words or sounds and being able to make sounds like 't' and 'k' clearly so people can understand what you say.

Language refers to talking and understanding, joining words together into sentences, stories and conversations. It's knowing the right words to explain what you mean and making sense of what people say.

Communication refers to how we interact with others, using language or gestures in different ways, for example to have a conversation or give directions. It's also being able to understand other people's points of view and understanding and using body language and facial expressions.



What are speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)?

Put simply, **children and young people with SLCN find it difficult to communicate with others.** This can be because of difficulties with speech, with talking, with understanding what is said to them or with interacting with other people around them. How well adults understand SLCN can have a really important effect on the impact SLCN make on children and young people's lives.

It's estimated that 10% of all children and young people have long term or persistent SLCN. ⁵

For some, language is the only difficulty they have; everything else, like their cognitive and physical skills are OK. This can be called a primary or specific speech, language or communication difficulty or impairment. You may hear the term SLI (specific language impairment).

For others, their SLCN are part of another condition. This can include things like learning difficulties, autism and hearing impairment.

SLCN can be very severe and complex. The impacts for children and young people can be felt across all areas of their learning and development.

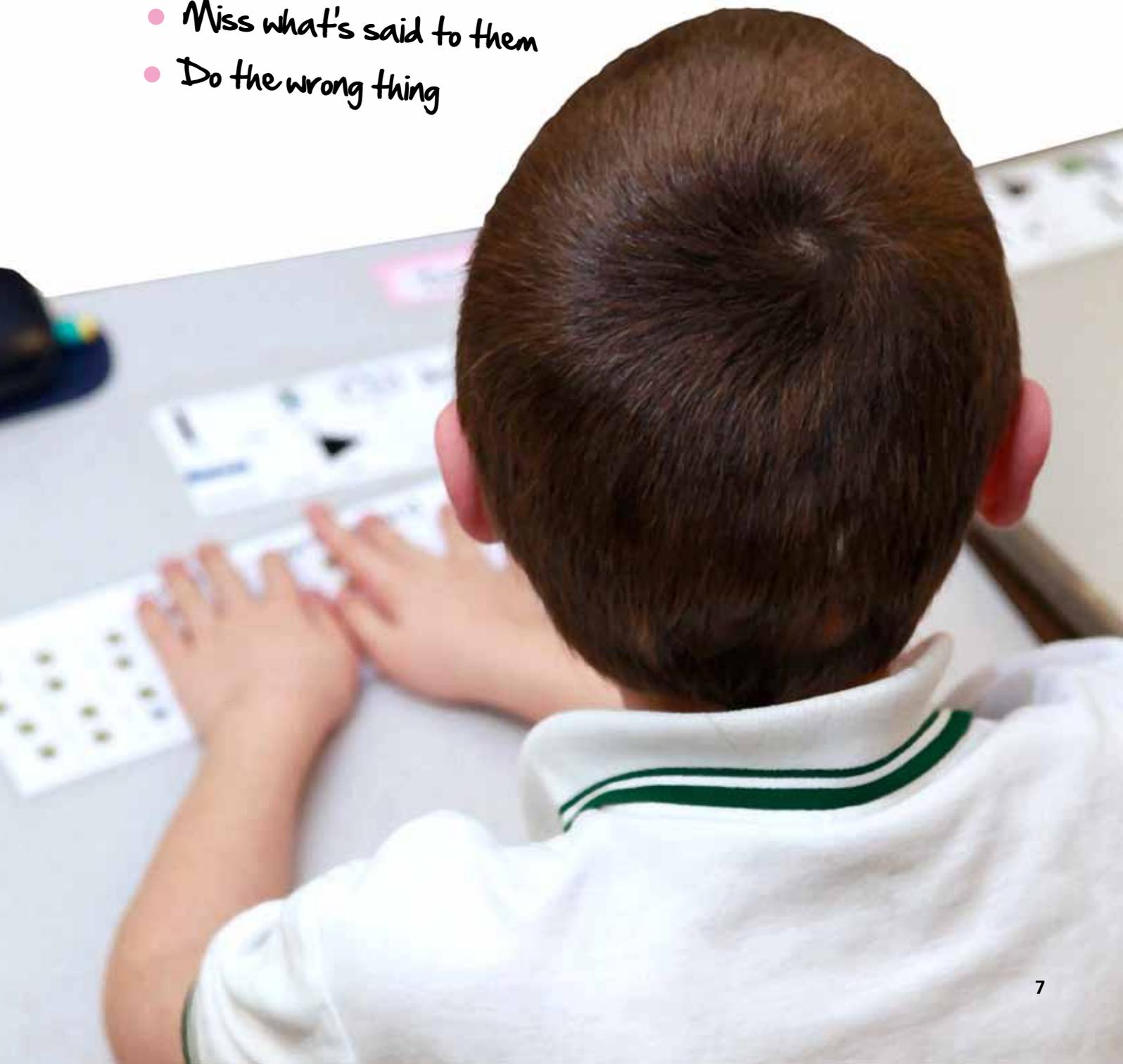
Children and young people with persistent SLCN will need targeted and often specialist support, focusing on both their speech, language and communication development and their learning.

Some children and young people have less severe forms of SLCN. This may be called delayed speech, language and communication. Children and young people are developing speech, language and communication in the same way as others, following typical patterns of development, but at a slower rate.

⁵ Law et al (2000) *Provision for children's speech and language needs in England and Wales: facilitating communication between education and health services* DfES research report p239

Pupils with delayed speech, language and communication might seem to:

- Have immature social skills
- Behave or sound like a younger child
- Know and use fewer words
- Talk in shorter sentences
- Struggle to listen well
- Miss what's said to them
- Do the wrong thing



What are speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)?

There are different reasons why this may happen. One risk factor is social disadvantage. Research has shown that in areas of social disadvantage, at least 50% of children have delayed language.⁶ However, it's important to note that children and young people from all areas and backgrounds can have delayed language.

One important point about children and young people with delayed language is that the right support at the right time can help them to catch up. Evidence also shows that these difficulties can persist throughout their school careers for those who do not have support.

For more information and case studies about SLCN, two useful publications are:

- *Misunderstood* - explains what SLCN are. Includes advice and guidance on how to support communication development
- *Don't Get Me Wrong* - follow-on publication from *Misunderstood* and gives more information and advice on SLCN

Both are available to download from www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/publications

Speaking English as an additional language is not an SLCN; there can be many advantages for bilingual learners. It's important to recognise and value all languages and parents should be encouraged to use their home language with their children at home. It can take around two years to develop a second language adequate for communication and social interaction and even children and young people who have developed good social language will need time to develop the complex language for learning in school.⁷

However, children and young people with English as an additional language are at the same risk of SLCN as any other child and identifying their needs can sometimes be more difficult. For more information go to

www.londonsigbilingualism.co.uk



What is the impact of SLCN?

The impact of SLCN can be significant and wide-ranging. The I CAN Talk paper series covers key themes using research evidence to highlight the importance of speech, language and communication and the impacts of SLCN. Particularly relevant topics include:

- Literacy difficulties
- Social exclusion
- Primary-aged children
- The early years
- Secondary-aged young people

All 9 papers, including a key document *The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication* can be found at: www.ican.org.uk/evidence

Impact on learning and attainment

As pupils become literate, language and literacy support each other. Without underlying language skills, pupils cannot effectively access the curriculum; this impacts on their attainment. For example:

- 50-90% of children with persistent SLCN go on to have reading difficulties ⁸
- In one study, at age 6 there was a gap of a few months in reading age between those with good and poor oral language skills. By 14, the gap had widened to a difference of 5 years in reading age ⁹

- Only 25% of pupils with SLCN achieve the expected level in English at the end of Key Stage 2 and
- 15% of pupils with SLCN achieve 5 GCSE A*-Cs ¹⁰

Impact on social, emotional development and behaviour ¹¹

- Children with SLCN feel they are less able or popular than their peers
- Children with SLCN are more likely to be bullied
- Those with early language impairment are at a higher risk of mental health problems

There's strong evidence that many children and young people who have Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) have SLCN which have never been recognised. Studies show this to be between 55% and 100% of pupils with SEBD

- Two thirds of 7-14 year olds with serious behaviour problems had a language impairment
- At least 60% of young people in young offender's institutions have communication difficulties

⁶ Locke, A., Ginsborg, J., and Peers, I. (2002)

⁷ Cummins, J. (1984)

⁸ Stothard et al (1998)

⁹ Hirsch (1996) Source: Dockrell, J, Every Child a Talker Conference 2010

¹⁰ Data from the National Pupil Database quoted in the Bercow Report, p18 (2008)

¹¹ Cross, M. (2007) *Language and Social Exclusion*

How can you support children and young people?

Making communication a priority in your classroom

Whatever age you teach, whatever your subject, language is crucial. How many new words do you use in one day? How much do your classes talk with each other, work in groups or share what they have done with the rest of the class? How do you use language to instruct, explain, question and extend? How much written language is there too?

The Cambridge Primary Review states: 'the ways in which teachers talk to children can influence learning, memory, understanding and the motivation to learn.'

Imagine a lesson without using language. This shows how important these speech, language and communication skills are (and how they can be taken for granted). However, there are simple ways to ensure speech, language and communication aren't overlooked:

Planning for speech, language and communication

Consider language when you plan –

- What are the new words, how might you introduce them?
- What opportunities are there to develop your pupils' listening skills?
- How can you teach them effective group work skills?
- How can you provide opportunities for them to talk and listen together?

Ensure there are opportunities to support and explore language every day.

- The Communication Cookbook is a great resource for including communication in the primary classroom. It includes easy ways to support the key areas of attention and listening, vocabulary, building sentences, telling stories and conversations. It uses a '5-a-day' model to include simple language activities into each day, without involving a great deal of extra work. Even though the activities are aimed at younger children, the principle works just as well for older pupils. Available from: www.ican.org.uk/cookbook
- As part of the *Hello* campaign, example lesson plans with a strong focus on speaking and listening have been developed across different subjects and year groups for primary and secondary teachers. The plans and relevant resources are available at: www.hello.org.uk/get-involved/want-to-run-a-no-pens-day.aspx

Enhancing your pupils' communication skills will really support their learning and attainment across the curriculum.

What are your roles?

- To make communication a priority in your classroom
- To be able to identify children's SLCN
- To work effectively with children with SLCN



How you can support children and young people

Making your classroom great for communication

A communication friendly environment should make communication as easy, effective and enjoyable as possible. It should provide opportunities for everyone to talk, listen, understand and take part. There are also simple ways you can make your classroom 'communication friendly'. This might include thinking about:

- Space, light and layout
- Noise levels
- Using visual support
- Clear and consistent routines
- The role of adults in the environment
- How opportunities are planned and created to support communication throughout the day

There's more information about creating communication friendly environments at www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/publications/checklists

Helping to identify SLCN 'Spotting' pupils who find communication tricky

The first step in identifying a pupil who has SLCN is by someone noticing that they are struggling with their communication. As a teacher, you have a crucial role in being the 'someone' who spots these difficulties. Some pupils may already have been picked up by health visitors or early years practitioners, or their parents may have raised concerns. However, there are many children and young people whose needs have slipped through the net.



A great start to being able to do this is having a sound understanding of what communication skills to expect from the pupils you work with. If you're familiar with where the average 5, 10 or 16 year old should be with their speech, language and communication, it will help you spot those who are struggling. For example:

- 6 year olds who don't understand 2 to 3 part spoken instructions like: *"Finish your picture, then sit on the carpet and look at a book"*
- 8 year olds who don't take turns to talk, listen, and respond in two-way conversations and groups
- 12 year olds who don't use complex joining words like *meanwhile, therefore*

With these children you may need to explore further and raise your concerns with the child's parents or a colleague at your school.

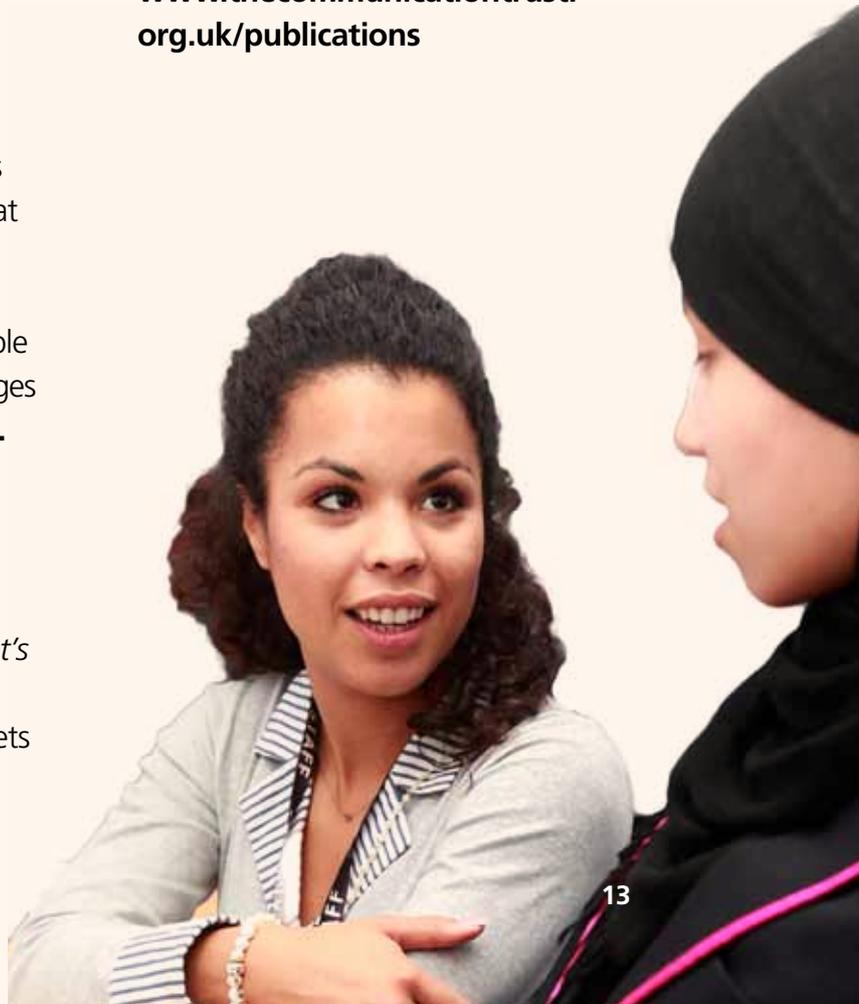
There are some helpful resources available that show what to expect at different ages and stages of development from www.hello.org.uk/resources including:

- Primary Milestone Poster – *What's typical talk at primary?*
- Secondary Milestone Poster – *What's typical talk at secondary?*
- *Universally Speaking* – three booklets available for those who work with children aged 0-5, 5-11 and 11-18

Using tools to identify SLCN

There is a range of really useful checklists and tools which teachers can use to identify pupils' SLCN in more detail. For example:

- The Inclusion Development Programme www.nasentraining.org.uk/resources
- Afasic Checklists age 4-10 www.afasicengland.org.uk/publications/resources-for-professionals
- *Don't Get me Wrong* also includes a structured 'indicators checklist' which you can use to get a clear picture of a pupil's SLCN www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/publications



Further advice on supporting children and young people with SLCN

Use supportive strategies as part of your teaching

To support pupils who have SLCN, working with others is really important and you can seek advice from your local speech and language therapy team. The following suggestions, taken from the publication *Don't Get Me Wrong*, are good practice not only for children and young people with SLCN but for all children in your classroom.

If they have difficulty understanding language

- Making classroom language easier to understand can improve compliance and general behaviour
- Consider the teaching environment, e.g. reduce background noise and distractions

Check their understanding

- Support pupils to recognise when they don't understand
- Ask them to repeat back in their own words what you've said, then you will know how much they have understood

Help them focus on what's important

- Make sure you're facing the child or young person when giving information
- Use their name at the start of instructions if they are not focussed
- Use phrases like 'everyone needs to listen to this', however this instruction may be difficult for someone who has autism
- Give an overview first and then go into more detail



- Give pointers for what they should listen to such as, 'It's important you remember X from what I am going to tell you'
- Summarise where necessary before you go into detail
- Emphasise key words

Give extra thinking time

- Allow extra time for them to listen and process language

General ways to help improve communication

- Use simple language
- Use short chunks of language and only include the important points
- Repeat and rephrase where necessary
- Slow your speech and insert more pauses
- Use shorter sentences
- Avoid or explain difficult words or idioms for example say 'make' instead of 'produce'

Teach them strategies

- Encourage pupils to repeat what they have to remember 'in their head' or to visualise what they have to do
- Teach and encourage the use of clarification strategies such as asking 'What does X mean?'

Provide other cues

- Support what you're saying with visual cues, gestures, diagrams, pictures and so on
- Use visual timetables to help their understanding of the sequence of events
- Mind maps may help some pupils and can be used to capture ideas
- Narrative frames including cues such as 'who?', 'where?', 'when?', 'what happened?'
- Demonstrate where possible



Further advice on supporting children and young people with SLCN

Help them make links

- Link new information to what the children and young people already know

If they have difficulty expressing themselves

- Listen and show your interest by maintaining eye contact and using their name but be aware that excessive use of eye contact may be difficult for some pupils, particularly those with autism
- Be patient and let them know you'll wait
- Give positive feedback for effort
- Build on what they've already said, follow their lead
- Increase opportunities for real dialogue and conversation, take short turns
- Sometimes you may have to say (kindly) that you cannot understand and perhaps there is another way to explain it
- Offer help and support when they ask for it
- Make sure they're not rushed or feeling rushed
- Don't correct, instead provide the right model of spoken language
- Respond to **what** they're trying to say rather than **how**
- Prompt with cues such as 'first', 'then', 'last'

If someone stammers

- Be calm and patient
- Give them time to think before responding
- Allow them time to finish what they're saying rather than finishing their sentence for them
- Do not put pressure on them to speak or read aloud

If communication is a problem

- Explain the effect on the listener when social communication rules are broken and perhaps explore through role play
- Praise good listening skills
- Encourage them to wait for a gap, or a clear signal from the speaker before joining in
- Encourage pupils to look at the non-verbal cues which help us understand what the other person thinks and feels, for example when a person pauses, that means you can have a turn
- Model the language you would like to hear
- Teach useful phrases such as ...'Can I just say,' 'Sorry to interrupt but...'
- and 'Sorry, you go ahead'

- Make explicit class rules about who can speak and when. For example, is it always hands-up to ask a question and does the same rule apply for every lesson?
- Explain about different ways of speaking in different contexts and how it's useful to have more than one way, as it widens your choices and options in the future
- Discuss the effects of saying the wrong thing to the wrong person
- Point out what you feel is rude and why
- Track how much of a conversation each person has, is it equally shared?
- Use social stories to explain how turn-taking works and why it's important to listen to other people's views
- Specifically teach negotiation skills
- Discuss how people manage their emotions
- Discuss how tone of voice and posture give clues to emotions
- Encourage them to think about and discuss how stories, current events and discoveries make them feel

If they do not have enough language

- Focus on pronouncing new words well
- Encourage the development of new words
- When teaching a new topic, ensure the new words that are associated are taught



Further advice on supporting children and young people with SLCN

Work together with other professionals

There are a range of other professionals with a wealth of knowledge and experience who may be able to offer advice and support in working with pupil with SLCN. They include people like Speech and Language Therapists, Specialist or Advisory Teachers, Educational Psychologists and SENCOs. Services will vary according to location, but joint working has been shown to be effective in supporting children and young people with SLCN.

Find out your current knowledge about speech, language and communication

You can complete an online self-evaluation using the Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF). The SLCF is for all people who work with children and young people and outlines different skills and knowledge needed to be able to support children's communication. As well as finding out how confident you feel, the SLCF can signpost you to further relevant sources of information and professional development. You can find the SLCF at: www.talkingpoint.org.uk/slcf

Information and resources included in this leaflet may help to develop skills and knowledge in the following areas on the SLCF: **Universal** A1, A2, A4, A5, A6, A9, B1, B2, B3, B4, B6, B7, C2, D1
Enhanced A4, B1, B2, B3, B4, C2, E3



Places to go for more information

- **www.talkingpoint.org.uk** – lots of information for parents and professionals on speech, language and communication development and needs
- **www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk** – focuses on workforce development in speech, language and communication
- **www.hello.org.uk** – access a range of resources that have been developed for the national year of communication for those who work with children and young people
- **www.afasic.org.uk** – Afasic is a parent support organisation and has lots of useful resources for professionals, including factsheets on different types of SLCN and identification checklists
- **www.ican.org.uk** – information on communication, resources and evidence based papers such as Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Primary school-aged children; Language and Social Exclusion
- **www.bt.com/learningskillsresources** – free resources to support speaking and listening activities (for all children and young people not specifically targeting SLCN)
- The Inclusion Development Programme – **www.nasentraining.org.uk/resources** is a free, national online training programme which offers information and activities focusing on SLCN
- **www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/consortium** - signposts to members of The Communication Trust who have resources to support children's communication skills



The Communication Trust
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The Communication Trust is a group of over 40 voluntary sector organisations. We bring together our expertise to ensure that the speech, language and communication needs of all children and young people are met so that they can live life to the full.

We do this by raising awareness amongst professionals and parents of how important it is for children to have good communication skills, through providing advice, guidance and enabling access to specialist training and support.

The Communication Trust was founded in 2007 by Afasic, BT, Council for Disabled Children and I CAN.

For more information or to order further copies of this booklet please go to **www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk**

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Published December 2011

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