



## Speech and Language Difficulties

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Both children and young people may have communication problems. Sometimes the reason has been identified but on many occasions - especially where children are concerned - it may not be easy for the family to name the problem or identify its cause.

Many children/young people have communication problems because of:

- Delayed development
- Finding it difficult to put sentences together so that they can be understood (expressive language difficulty)
- Finding it difficult to remember words and their meanings
- Having difficulty in understanding what others say (receptive language difficulty)
- Otitis media (glue ear) causing intermittent hearing impairment which affects learning
- Pragmatic difficulty (using spoken and nonverbal communication to interact socially)
- Speech dyspraxia / verbal dyspraxia (a motor coordination difficulty affecting pronunciation)
- Using the wrong sounds in speech and not improving following the expected developmental pattern (phonological difficulty)

### Specific Language Impairment (SLI)

This occurs when language development falls well behind other children/young people of the same age. They may also be behind in other skills as well. These problems can interfere with everyday life and school achievement.

Speech, language and communication underpin everything we do – making our needs known, expressing our likes and dislikes, interacting with others and building relationships.

We often take these skills for granted, but many children and young people struggle to communicate. They may have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

### SLCN- Speech, language and Communication Needs

A child/young person with speech, language and communication needs:

- Might have speech that is difficult to understand
- They might struggle to say words or sentences
- They may not understand words that are being used, or the instructions they hear
- They may have difficulties knowing how to talk and listen to others in a conversation
- They may have no speech and use other ways to communicate



Children may have just some or all of these difficulties; they are all very different.

Speech, language and communication are crucial for reading, learning in school, for socialising and making friends, and for understanding and controlling emotions or feelings.

SLCN is often called a 'hidden difficulty'. Many children/young people with SLCN look just like other children/young people, and can be just as clever. This means that instead of communication difficulties people may see children/young people struggling to learn to read, showing poor behaviour, having difficulties learning or socialising with others. Some children may become withdrawn or isolated. Their needs are often misinterpreted, misdiagnosed or missed altogether.

A child with specific language impairment (SLI) may have difficulty in only one, or a combination of language areas. The nature and complexity of their difficulties can often be hidden due to skills they have in other areas. Very often there is no identified cause of SLI. Many more children and young people have SLCN as part of another condition. SLCN are a feature central to and common across most areas of disability. The following are examples of some of the conditions where children and young people are more likely to have SLCN:

- General learning difficulty (mild, moderate, severe, profound)
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Syndromes such as Down's syndrome, William's syndrome, Worcester-Drought syndrome, Fragile X
- Sensory impairment (hearing, visual or multi-sensory)
- Cerebral palsy.
- Dyslexia
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) /Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)

## Further information:

[www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk)

[www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)