WHAT ARE SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS?

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) is an umbrella term. Children with SLCN may have difficulty with many aspects of communication. These can include difficulties with fluency, forming sounds and words, formulating sentences, understanding what others say and using language socially.

Speech, Language and Communication Needs can occur in childhood as primary difficulties with speech, language and communication or secondary to other developmental conditions such as autism. In some cases the cause of a child’s SLCN is unknown.

SLCN are some of the most common childhood disabilities.

PERSISTENT SLCN

7% of children aged about five years have specific speech, language and communication impairment and a further 1.8% have SLCN linked to other conditions, such as learning disability, cerebral palsy and autism spectrum disorders.

DELAYED LANGUAGE

There is a group of children who are starting school with SLCN who have poor or delayed language skills. These children may have a small vocabulary, be just starting to join words together, find it hard to listen and may sound like a much younger child. With the right support, they may catch up with their peers. In some areas, particularly areas of social disadvantage, this group may be up to 50% of children.

UNTREATED SLCN

Speech, language and communication needs can have a direct impact on children’s development and educational outcomes, health and wellbeing. If left unaddressed, they can adversely affect children across their life span. For example, as many as 60% of young offenders and 88% of long-term unemployed young men have been found to have SLCN. (Bryan et al 2009).
The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists use the term speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) to describe difficulties across one or many aspects of communication.

### ATTENTION AND LISTENING

Children may have difficulties sharing their attention with others or listening to what has been said to them. They may struggle to concentrate on a game or activity for even a short period of time, flitting from one task to another without completing anything.

### PLAY AND INTERACTION

Children may have difficulty interacting with others or with social communication skills. They may struggle to use their language skills effectively to have conversations, play and interact socially with others. This can include poor eye-contact, difficulties taking turns in a conversation, difficulties keeping to the topic of conversation and showing awareness of the listener.

### RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE

Children may struggle to understand and make sense of words that they hear. They may struggle to follow instructions and make sense of the language they hear around them.

### EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

Children may find it difficult to express their ideas, wants or feelings. They may have a small vocabulary for their age or have difficulty building up sentences and using correct grammar.
SPEECH
Children may have speech which is difficult to understand which might include difficulty in making different sounds. They may have difficulty discriminating between speech sounds.

FLUENCY
Stammering or stuttering where sounds or words are repeated or may be difficult to produce without effort. Children might have hesitations in their speech and may prolong or repeat sounds and parts of words or sentences. They may struggle to get their words out at all. Stammering can emerge at any childhood stage, but most commonly between the ages of 2 and 5 years.

VOICE
Voice problems i.e. hoarse voice or persistent voice loss. An unusual and persistently harsh or unusual voice quality.

RESOURCES

FOR PROFESSIONALS
- Communication Trust: Misunderstood: supporting children and young people with speech, language and communication needs
- Communication Trust: Don’t get me wrong: Information for supporting children and young people with speech, language and communication needs
- Early Support: Information about Speech, Language and Communication Needs
- Other ways of Speaking: Supporting children and young people who have no speech or whose speech is difficult to understand

FOR PARENTS
- Early Support: Information for parents: Speech and Language Difficulties
- Listen up: resources to encourage listening, understanding, interaction and play. For pre-school children
- Communication Trust Postcards

REFERENCES