

Early Support

for children, young people and families

Information about speech, language and communication needs



About this resource

This information resource tells you all about speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

It has lots of information about finding out about SLCN, the issues that can be caused by SLCN and places that you can go to for help and information.

In the resource you will find information about difficulties in children and young people of all ages, from preschool through to young adulthood. It describes the different ways that you and your child can be affected by SLCN and what you can do to help.

If you are at the beginning stages of finding out about SLCN this resource will give you some helpful information about identification and diagnosis. If you know your child has SLCN, the resource might be able to give you some additional information about next steps.

This resource was developed by **I CAN** and **Afasic**, with input from the **Royal College for Speech and Language Therapists** for Early Support.

Early Support

Early Support is a way of working, underpinned by 10 principles that aim to improve the delivery of services for disabled children, young people and their families. It enables services to coordinate their activity better and provide families with a single point of contact and continuity through key working.

Early Support is a core partner supporting the implementation of the strategy detailed in Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability, the Government's 2011 Green Paper. This identified Early Support as a key approach to meeting the needs of disabled children, young people and their families.

Early Support helps local areas implement the Government's strategy to bring together the services families need into a single assessment and planning process covering education, health and care. Early Support provides a wide range of resources and training to support children, young people, families and service deliverers.

To find out more about **Early Support**, please visit www.ncb.org.uk/earllysupport

Where a word or phrase appears in colour, **like this**, it means you can either; look them up in the **Glossary** at the back of the resource; that the contact details for the organisation or agency identified are listed in the **Useful contacts and organisations** section; or that you can find out more in the **Who can help** section.

Explanation of the term parent carer

In this resource the term 'parent carer' is used. It means any person with parental responsibility for a child or young person with special educational needs or disability. It is intended as an inclusive term that can cover foster carers, adoptive parents and other family members.

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Speech, language and communication needs

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) – what does that mean?

Learning to talk and understand is a complicated process. There are lots of things a child needs to be able to do when they are learning to talk. They have to:

- understand words, sentences and conversations and know how to listen to others
- talk using the right words and in sentences that make sense
- know how to use their language the right way socially with others
- say sounds the right way so that their speech can be understood

When a child has SLCN some, or all, of these skills don't develop in the right way. This means they have difficulty communicating with others. They might:

- have difficulties learning words, or putting words into sentences
- have problems understanding what other people are saying to them
- find it hard to make friends and interact socially with people in the right way
- be hard to understand because they can't say sounds the right way

We know that about 1 in 10 children will have some kind of SLCN. A child might have problems with only one of these areas or they might struggle with more than one. All children with SLCN have different strengths and difficulties. We also know that in some parts of the country the number of children with SLCN is higher – in poorer areas there can be as many as 50% of children starting school with delayed language.

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

Children have SLCN for all sorts of different reasons and we don't always know what is causing them.

- Some children have SLCN because they have another type of learning difficulty, like autism, cerebral palsy or other learning difficulties.
- Some children might have a medical reason for their SLCN, like a hearing loss, or a physical cause, for example a cleft palate.
- Some children have an SLCN and there is no obvious reason why, they simply do not develop speech and language skills in the expected way.

How severe a child's difficulties are can also vary:

- Some children have difficulty for a period of time but then catch up with other children of the same age.

- Other children have a much more serious and persistent difficulty that has long term impact.
- For some children, their difficulties can be lifelong.

Different types of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)

The terminology used to describe SLCN can be very confusing. There are some frequently used words you may come across that are used to describe different types of speech, language and communication needs. Not everyone uses these words in the same way, but if you are confused you can ask the person talking to you to explain a bit more.

- Speech and language delay

The term **delay** is often used when a child has problems with speech or language, but skills are developing in the normal developmental sequence. This means that the pattern of development is as you would expect, but developing at a slower rate.

- Speech and language disorder

Children with a speech and language **disorder** learn to speak in a way that is different from the normal pattern or sequence of development; their speech and language development isn't what you would expect and they sound unusual, not just like a younger child.

- Specific language impairment (SLI)

SLI is a term that is used to describe particular difficulties with learning and using language. In SLI, these difficulties are not associated with factors such as general learning difficulties, or other conditions, such as cerebral palsy, hearing impairment or autistic spectrum disorders. The difficulties are only related to speech and language, hence the use of the term 'specific'. You can find out more about SLI from [Afasic](#) and [I CAN](#).

- Comprehension (or receptive language) difficulty

Children may have difficulty **understanding** words, sentences or instructions. This may be particularly true when they have no other clues from gestures or what is going on around them or in unfamiliar situations with no other people around to copy. Delayed or disordered comprehension (a problem understanding words and sentences) is often hard for families to identify as children can be very good at using the clues around them, and this hides their difficulties.

- Expressive language difficulty

A child may have good understanding of words, but find it difficult to **use** language to express their own ideas, needs or feelings. They might be slow to build up the number and type of words they use. They may know certain words, but be unable to think of them

when they're needed. They may have particular difficulty building up sentences and using correct grammar.

- Speech difficulties

This is difficulty saying words clearly with the correct sounds. It may be due to a 'phonology' difficulty - i.e. the sound system is confused or an articulatory difficulty - difficulty physically saying the sounds. The child's speech may be difficult to understand even by familiar adults.

Phonology refers to the **speech sounds** used in a particular language. A child may struggle to learn to say all the sounds they need, and so their speech is difficult to understand.

- Social interaction difficulties (sometimes called pragmatic difficulties)

Some children find it hard to follow the **rules** of communication and interact socially with others. They struggle with things like turn-taking in conversations, eye contact, listening to others and changing the way they talk according to who they are talking to.

- Stammering

Stammering is also sometimes called stuttering, dysfluency or non-fluency. The child may repeat words or parts of words, hesitate for long periods between words or totally get stuck on words. There is lots of information available on stammering available from the [British Stammering Association](#).

- Selective mutism

Some children are able to talk comfortably in some situations (usually with close family members at home) but are persistently silent in others (usually outside their homes and with less familiar people). This is often referred to as selective mutism which is linked to an anxiety around talking. Children may be able to join in activities that do not require speech, and some may be able to speak a little to their friends if they are not overheard. In other situations they can't talk at all. Details of [SMIRA](#), an organisation that can help with understanding selective mutism can be found in the Useful Contacts and Organisations section.

- Verbal dyspraxia

Verbal Dyspraxia is a condition where children have difficulty making and **co-ordinating** the precise movements their mouths need to make to produce clear speech. They find it hard to produce individual speech sounds and to put sounds together in the right order in words. As a result, their speech is often hard to understand even to family members. You can read lots more information on verbal dyspraxia on the [Apraxia Kids](#) website.

In the beginning

Knowing something is wrong

It's not always easy to tell if a child has a speech, language and communication need (SLCN), it depends on lots of things like how old they are, what type of difficulties they have and how severe their difficulties are. Some children have needs that are obvious from a very young age; other children don't have their needs identified until they are at school or even older. Sometimes, someone can be a young adult before they get a diagnosis of their difficulties. For lots of families getting to a point where a diagnosis is made can be a gradual and sometimes difficult process. It might be that it unfolds over time.

Usually a parent or family member will be the first person to realise that a child or young person has a difficulty. Sometimes, it can be staff at school or nursery who realise that there is a problem. Sometimes, a young person themselves will realise that they are struggling.

Often children are young when they have a diagnosis made; it is obvious that their speech and language have not developed as expected. However, some children are at primary or secondary school before SLCN is thought about as an issue. They may have managed the first parts of school without problems, but find the more complicated curriculum and larger demands on their language and communication skills a problem as they get older.

In young children, the following are all possible warning signs that something is wrong:

- does not respond to sound
- regressing with development
- little interest in communication
- talks more slowly than other children of the same age
- has difficulty understanding simple instructions or requests
- speech or language sounds that are unusual, compared with other children of the same age
- struggling with reading, spelling or maths
- difficulty being understood - even by members of your family
- difficulty paying attention to things that adults point to and talk about
- difficulty making and keeping friends, and joining in games

In older children and young people, the following things might be signs of SLCN:

- they might be slow to answer or to follow an instruction

- you might need to repeat an instruction several times and make it much simpler before they respond
- they might 'switch off' when someone is talking to them so you can tell they are not listening
- their language can sound muddled and they have difficulty organising their thoughts into words
- they may struggle with written work or telling you about something that has happened. What they manage might be very basic.
- they don't understand jokes, or language that is complicated like double meanings or idioms
- they may find it hard to join in or keep up with conversations

Getting a diagnosis

Getting a diagnosis can be really important as children with SLCN might have needs that are not very obvious because they look just like other children. Some people might think their behaviour is because they are naughty or have other learning difficulties. Some children will get a diagnosis based on their difficulties.

However, sometimes a diagnosis may not always be possible, or necessary. Many children with milder SLCN can be supported well in their school or nursery setting, or respond well to general support strategies, and so they don't need specific help. As children with SLCN have such a varied range of difficulties it really depends what their particular type of difficulty is.

If you are concerned about your child's speech, language and communication development you can seek advice from your Health Visitor, Early Years practitioner, school nurse or teacher. They will be able to advise whether a referral to speech and language therapy is needed. They can support you to make a referral if necessary. You can refer to speech and language therapy directly but it is always useful to share your concerns with your child's relevant professionals first. Speech and language therapists have specialist skills and knowledge about the development of speech, language and communication and are specifically trained to:

- assess speech, language and communication development
- identify whether there are any difficulties
- make a diagnosis and clarify the nature of any difficulty
- develop a treatment plan and work with you to implement that plan
- judge when treatment is complete and when a child should be discharged

You can refer your child yourself to your local speech and language therapy (SLT) service. You do not have to wait for someone else to refer you, particularly if you are concerned

after talking to a number of different people. Or, if you want to you can ask for your child to be referred by:

- your health visitor
- your child's nursery staff, teacher or SENCo
- your GP

The SLT assessment will tell you if your child does have a difficulty. SLT services are run differently depending on where you live. The SLT will be able to tell you about what they can do and other suitable help in the area. You are likely to be put on a waiting list to get an assessment; the length of the wait can vary depending on where you live.

The SLT assessment may take place at a clinic, Children's centre, your home, nursery , school or other suitable venue. This will depend on the Service where you live. Often a SLT assessment for younger children will take place in a clinic, although they may see a child at nursery. It is possible to get your child assessed privately, although this will of course cost money. You can contact [ASLTIP](#) to find out the name of a private SLT working in your area.

There is more information about SLT assessments on the [Talking Point](#) website. If you would like to talk to someone about SLT assessments, [Afasic](#) provides a telephone helpline for parents offering information about speech and language therapy and getting support. [I CAN](#) has an enquiry service where you can e-mail or talk to one of their speech and language therapists for more information.

After the diagnosis

Some children and young people are given a clear diagnosis straight away; for others it might be a complicated process. This is because it depends on the type of difficulties they have, and other aspects of their development. It might mean that other professionals such as a paediatrician, an educational psychologist or specialist teacher might need to assess a child too. Some children may not be given a diagnosis, but information and strategies passed on to their parent carer.

If your child sees a speech and language therapist (SLT) they, in collaboration with others if needed, will identify where your child's main difficulties are and decide on the best type of support for them. They might:

- reassure you that your child's speech and language are as expected and discharge you
- give you some ideas, strategies and resources to help your child and ask to see you again a few months later
- offer your child regular speech and language therapy sessions. These might be group or individual sessions

- provide your child's nursery or school with a programme of ideas, strategies and activities to help them in that setting. Not all children need direct speech and language therapy from an SLT and sometimes it is more helpful to support the people around a child with SLCN
- refer you for further assessment, to find out more about your child's needs

If you have any queries or concerns about your child's diagnosis or speech and language therapy support, you should always ask your SLT for more information.

Some children with SLCN only need SLT support for a short while; they are able to catch up with their peers quickly. Some children, however, will need ongoing speech and language therapy support. Children and young people with more severe and complicated SLCN are likely to need support in school and possibly even into adulthood, depending on the needs they have.

Help and support in school can take different forms. Not all children will need regular intervention from an SLT. It may be that an SLT may visit a school and provide ideas and information to help a child rather than see them directly. The school may already have resources and support strategies in place for helping children with SLCN. Other children, with most severe needs will need specific help and support. This might come from an SLT working with them, or someone in the school, like a teaching assistant, will do extra speech and language tasks with them.

Telling others about your child's difficulties

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) can be very complicated and are often not easy to explain. You might need to discuss your child's difficulties with other family members, friends or staff at your child's school. Tell them as much as you can about what they can do, what they struggle with and how they can help. Giving this information to schools and nurseries will make it easier for them to help your child.

Your speech and language therapist will give you information on your child's speech and language difficulties. They may not always provide you with a written report but may write in your 'red book' or give you a programme to follow. Make sure that a copy is given to everyone that may need to know about their needs, including early years staff and teachers. You may also find it helpful to chat about their difficulties to leaders of any activities your child takes part in, for example scout leaders, swimming teachers, sport coaches. It will be helpful for them to know that your child may find it hard to understand their instructions or to talk to them.

It would be helpful to show them some information that can help them to understand. **Afasic** have some publications that help to explain SLCN, to both parents and family members and people that might work with a child, for example youth workers.

The **Talking Point** website has lots of information about SLCN. It includes sections specifically for early years workers and teachers; it might be helpful to talk through this when you are discussing your child's needs with school staff.

The Communication Trust have published several booklets about SLCN, aimed at parents and staff working in schools. Again these might be helpful to look at when you are discussing your child's needs with those around them.

Early Years

Getting started

If you are worried that your child might have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) it might be helpful for you to find out a bit more about how speech, language and communication skills usually develop.

How do children normally develop speech, language and communication?

Children learn to talk at different rates and there is a lot of variation in 'typical' development. However, development tends to happen in a particular order and so we know what most children of a certain age are likely to be doing.

The first year

First steps towards communication:

- Learning to communicate starts very soon after birth, as babies make faces and sounds that attract attention from the adults around them. They quickly learn that when they cry, people are more likely to comfort them and give them what they need.
- Other aspects of communication develop long before first words appear. Babies learn to distinguish human voices from other noises around them and newborns learn early to respond to the sound of their mother's voice.
- Learning to take turns also begins very early on. Think about how a baby is fed. When a baby stops drinking, the adult will often start talking and when a baby starts drinking, the adult stops. This is a very early lesson in communication - when one person talks, the other listens. Early games like 'peek-a-boo' help babies learn to wait for another person to speak and to pay attention to someone who is talking.

First steps towards understanding:

- Children learn words by linking the sounds they hear to the objects they see. For example, they hear the word "dog" when they see the animal in front of them. Gradually children build up a vocabulary of words that they have heard in different contexts and then they want to use them. The more children hear words in the right context, the more likely they are to understand and use them correctly and the more quickly they will pick up vocabulary. So, the talking that a parent does during normal everyday routines, like nappy changing and feeding, is very important in the days and months before a child begins to speak.

First steps towards talking:

- Babies gradually learn to control the sounds that they make, experimenting with making sounds at the same time as beginning to associate meaning with them. They play at making different sounds, first in isolation and then putting them together. Eventually, they produce repetitive strings of sounds, or babble. They usually do this when they are between 6 and 12 months.
- Babies slowly become aware that particular sounds lead the adults around them to respond in different ways. For example, “mama” sounds lead parents to say “*mummy? Yes, mummy’s here*”. This rewards early attempts at communication and encourages children to use particular combinations of sounds, or words, again. For example, children learn over time that “*mama*” is linked with “*mummy*” and that a different set of sounds is linked with “*daddy*”. By about 12 months old children are usually starting to say their first words.

Speech and language development between 12 months and 5 years

- Over the second year of life, most children pick up words very quickly and learn that what they say shapes their world. This encourages them to use more words and by about 18 months they have developed a vocabulary of about 50 words and can understand many more.
- When they have 30-40 single words, many children start to put them together for the first time into very simple sentences or word combinations. For example, a child may say “*dog gone*” or “*bye-bye dog*” when their pet goes outside. By 2 years children can say lots of words and are starting to put 2 or 3 words together.
- It’s a normal part of the process for children to produce immature speech, which sound ‘wrong’ compared with ‘grown up’ language. When children first start speaking, they can only use a simple, restricted set of sounds and so many words are simplified. For example, a child may talk about a “*dair*” rather than a “*chair*”. This is a normal stage in the development of speech sounds. By the time a child is about 3 and a half we expect them to be able to be understood by most people, including people outside of their family.
- By the time a child is 4 or 5 years old they are using longer sentences and these are generally well formed.

You can find out lots of information about typical speech, language and communication development on the [Talking Point](#) website. You can also download typical development information from [I CAN](#), the children’s communication charity and [The Communication Trust’s](#) website.

Many young children are brought up **learning more than one language**. In the first few years, they may get confused with which word to use in which language, but generally they learn language in much the same way as children using only one language do.

Cultural differences may influence which words they are exposed to, but once they are in nursery or playgroup these differences soon disappear and bilingualism is often a distinct advantage to children as they start to learn to think about language and start to read.

It's important to remember all the time that children learn language at different rates. Being a bit faster or slower than other children of the same age normally has little bearing on how individuals turn out later on.

Speech, language and communication needs

When children are not able to talk or understand as we expect them to, they are said to have a speech, language and communication need (SLCN). There is lots of information about what that means and how to get a diagnosis in the 'Getting Started' section. Getting the right help is really important and there are things that you can do that will make things easier for you and your child.

General information

Everyday life

We know that lots of children have some kind of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN); over one million children and young people in the UK. This doesn't mean they cannot live happy and fulfilling lives. Children and young people with SLCN can join in family activities, social events and clubs and participate in many of the things that all children enjoy. They may, however, need help and support from others to make sure this happens.

It is important that the people that your child comes into contact with regularly know about and understand their SLCN. This includes family members, as well as nursery and school staff, childminders and people like club leaders. Making sure these people understand about SLCN can help your child's everyday life to continue. There are many information books and websites that can help to explain SLCN. Ask teachers, friends and family to look at the information available on the [I CAN](#), [Afacic](#) and [Talking Point](#) websites. You might find it helpful to direct them to the support organisations listed in the 'who can help' and 'resources' sections.

Making sense of the world

Sometimes the world can be a confusing place for a child with SLCN. Often they will find it hard to understand language that is not related to the 'here and now' and so they can struggle to make sense of what is going on. You can help your child by:

- Making sure you try to give them instructions that are within their understanding. This probably means you will need to use short, simple sentences and simple vocabulary wherever possible.

- Repeat instructions and give them lots of time to process the information. Find another way of saying something if they are confused.
- Pictures, photos and symbols are great ways to help children make sense of what is happening. Your child will probably find it very helpful if you are able to show them as well as tell them. If your child struggles with changes in routine, pictures can be used to show the sequence of what is going to happen; this might help them to understand it better. It is much easier to remember what has been said to us if a person's talking is supported by photos, pictures, symbols or actual objects.

Playing

Play is one of the most important ways that children can learn about themselves and the world around them. Through play children can develop their thinking, speech and language, and social skills.

The development of play is closely linked to the development of language. Children learn to listen, take turns, copy and understand and use new language through play. The interactions that children have with others during play can act as a great motivator for them to communicate.

There are different types of play and children need to develop the ability to take part in these. Each has a different role to play in helping a child to develop their speech and language skills. Some children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) find playing difficult either because they don't have the language skills, they struggle with the ideas or they find the social aspect of playing with others very difficult.

There are things that you can do to help. Playing and having time together are really important and you can use any toys or games that you have at home for supporting communication:

- You can **use imaginative play** toys to join in with your child's imaginative play. For example dressing up clothes, doll's house, teddy/dolly tea set, Playmobile are really good for imaginative play. Imaginative play will help you expand your child's language beyond what they can immediately see and develop their creativity. Try to comment on what they are saying and doing rather than asking lots of questions. This not only reinforces their language skills, but also shows them that you are interested and listening to them.
- **Messy play** helps with sensory exploration and can be used to develop language skills. For example water play, sand play, chalk boards, finger painting and playdough all help children to develop their awareness of different sensations and can be used to talk about actions; things like pour, squash, squeeze, pull, rub, and different colours and textures, like rough, soft, smooth.
- You can use **puzzles** to help your child build their early vocabulary. You can start by commenting on the piece that they are putting in, then move on to giving them

the choice *“Do you want the car or the fish?”* before encouraging them to ask for what they want by saying *“Which piece do you want now?”*

- You can use **listening CDs** to encourage your child to increase their listening and attention skills (these are crucial for a child who is learning language) and help to build their vocabulary. You can add information to what they are listening to for example, if they hear a cockerel crowing you can talk about farms where you might see a cockerel and the other animals that you might see.
- Taking turns is an essential communication skill and playing any **simple board games** that involves taking turns not only helps children to develop this skill, it also helps them to listen and attend to an activity for longer periods of time.
- **Repetitive books** help children listen to and enjoy stories. Don't be afraid to tell a story more than once, repetition helps children to understand and remember the words that they hear. Children love to join in with the bits that they remember and so books that have a repetitive line through them are great.

Home environment

Children spend most of their time at home and it offers a great opportunity for them to develop their speech, language and communication skills. Ask the professionals that work with your child – their early years worker, teacher or speech and language therapist (if they see one) – for ways to help them at home.

Your child's SLCN may mean that they have difficulties with some parts of the home environment. They might:

- find it hard to follow the everyday routines, or struggle if these are changed
- get frustrated if they can't tell you what they want, or can't understand what is happening. This might mean that they show difficult behaviour or act in a naughty way
- play on their own because they find it hard to join in games with their siblings or friends
- use non-verbal communication, like pulling you or pointing, because they don't have the language to tell you what they want

You might find the following tips helpful for supporting your child's speech, language and communication development in their everyday life:

- **Make learning language fun** - Funny voices, rhymes, noises and singing all help children to learn language. Be silly gains their attention.
- **Make it easy for your child to listen and talk** - It is easier for your child to know what to listen to if your voice is not being masked by the television or music. Give

your child quiet times to help them focus on your words. If your child uses a dummy, make sure that it is not in the way of their talking. Keep dummies to sleeptimes.

- **Use simple, repetitive language** - Keep sentences short as you talk about what is happening (*"We're driving in the car"* or *"Wow, you're building a tower"*).
- **Get your child's full attention first** - Get down to your child's level and engage their attention before speaking or asking a question. Try saying their name to encourage them to stop and listen. Talking about what your child is interested in will also help to gain their attention.
- **Build on what they say** - Talk very clearly and add one or two words to your child's sentence, so if your child says "look car", you could say "look, red car".
- **Give them time to respond** - Children often need time to put their thoughts together before answering, so give them longer to respond than you would with an adult.
- **Demonstrate the right way** - Praise your child's efforts, even if the results aren't perfect – simply say the correct pronunciation rather than point out the mistake. For example, if your child says *"Look at the dod"*, you can say *"Yes, it's a dog"*.
- **Use helpful tools and strategies to help their understanding and use of language** - Things like pictures, photos, everyday objects and symbol charts can all be used to help your child understand what to expect from the day and let them tell you what they want if they can't do it with words.
- **Avoid asking questions** - Instead comment on what your child is doing for example, when you are playing say *"Teddy eating, teddy jumping"* rather than asking *"What's teddy doing?"*

You can get activities and resources for supporting your child's speech, language and communication from [I CAN](#), the children's communication charity and [The Communication Trust](#). Resources for supporting SLCN are available from [Afacis's](#) website.

Equipment and aids

Sometimes children with SLCN need to use a different way to communicate instead of, or as well as, talking. This might be something like signing, a picture chart or symbol book or it may be more high tech like an electronic communication aid. This type of support is referred to as augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).

Children with less severe SLCN may find it helpful to use signing and symbols and it might be that you set this up at home yourself, or talk it through with staff at their nursery.

More technical AAC support would usually be supplied based upon a recommendation from a speech and language therapist if it is appropriate for a child. The exact type of AAC support depends on lots of things, like how severe their needs are, what their coordination skills are like, how able they are to use a machine and their understanding of the aid.

Read lots of information about AAC, how it can help and available services on the [Communication Matters](#) and [ACE Centre](#) websites.

[The Communication Trust](#) has a booklet about 'Other Ways of Speaking' available from their website.

You can read all about signing support and resources on the [The Makaton Charity](#) and [Signalong](#) websites.

Meeting others

Parent and toddler groups

Parent and toddler groups provide ideal opportunities for meeting others. If your child has speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) you can go to any local parent and toddler group; you don't have to find a group for children with SLCN.

Parent and toddler groups provide great opportunities for helping your child develop their speech, language and communication skills. Singing, activities like play-doh, water play and group activities are all great for helping speech, language and communication skills to develop. Early years activities very often have a speech, language and communication focus as this is such an important part of early development.

In some places, groups are run specifically for children who have SLCN and other types of special education needs. You could ask your health visitor, local children's centre or local speech and language therapist if they know of any groups that might be suitable for you.

Support groups

It can be very helpful for parent carers to talk to other people whose children also have SLCN. [Afasic](#) have local groups that offer support; you can find out more from their website. Online forums may also be able to help you to locate local support groups, so it may be worth looking at places like [Mumsnet](#) for more information. [Contact a Family](#) and [The Parent Partnership Network](#) might also be able to put you in touch with local groups or organisations.

Choosing a pre-school

Most parents choose for their child to go to their local pre-school.

Language and communication is a very central part of the early years foundation stage - the curriculum that they follow in pre-school settings - so activities are often focussed around helping language and communication skills to develop.

Staff in pre-schools and other practitioners working with young children, like childminders, often know about how to encourage speech and language development and how to help children who have difficulty with this. Because they deal with lots of children, they can

often spot when a child needs to be referred to a speech and language therapist, and when to involve other practitioners who can give expert advice.

You can find more about your local pre-school by contacting your local Family Information Service or asking your Health Visitor or local Children's centre.

When you are choosing a pre-school for your child, you might find it helpful to think about the following things:

- pay a visit, it will help you form an opinion. Ask if you and your child can spend a bit of time watching.
- chat to the staff, find out about the types of training that they have.
- listen to how the staff talk. Do they use simple, repetitive language? Do they make sure children are listening? Do they use gestures and signs to support what they are saying? These things are helpful for all children, especially those with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).
- how well organised is it? Children need routines. Do they use a visual (picture) timetable to tell children what's going on?
- are there quiet areas set aside and is there separate space for group activities?

When a child has SLCN, or pre-school staff think they might have difficulties, other people might get involved. These may be:

- a practitioner from your local Children's centre who focuses on play and learning
- a Portage worker to support early development
- an early years advisory teacher (an experienced teacher with expertise in special educational needs, who can advise on ways to support children who require extra or additional help)
- an educational psychologist, who can assess other areas of a child's development and learning ability
- a paediatrician, who is a doctor who treats children. Some paediatricians specialise in children with developmental disorders

These people, along with parent carers and the speech and language therapist can find out all about a child's needs.

Children who need more help than others to learn are described as having special educational needs (SEN). Children with SLCN are described as having SEN when their speech and language difficulties get in the way of their learning. Children with SEN require extra or different help than children of the same age usually gets.

The information that you have about your child and their needs will help you to find them the right pre-school. The practitioners that know your child will help you to make your decisions.

You can read more about SEN on the [Network 81](#), [IPSEA](#) and the [Parent Partnership Network](#) websites. You can get information about the special educational needs process from the [Gov.uk](#) website. The [Afasic](#) helpline and [I CAN](#) enquiry service can also provide information about SEN.

Starting pre-school

Starting pre-school can be a tricky time when your child has SLCN. These things may make it easier for you, your child and the staff at the pre-school:

- Make sure the pre-school know about and understand your child's difficulties. They will be able to help your child better if they have seen reports that explain their needs.
- Find out about the way the pre-school works with the speech and language therapy service. Every child with SLCN has different needs so the speech and language therapist may visit your child in nursery, or they may give the staff support and resources to help your child.
- Set up clear systems for communication. If you are not going to see the staff at pre-school every day, ask if you can use a home-school communication book so that they can tell you how your child has got on.
- Ask the pre-school to send you some information before your child starts with them. Photos of key staff and important places like the playground can help your child become familiar with the pre-school before they start.
- Ask if the pre-school can send you some information about the timetable each day. You can talk it through with your child, so that they know what to expect.
- Share approaches and strategies, to ensure that everyone is doing the same thing. This might be communication strategies that you have set up, for example symbol charts, or behaviour strategies to manage any frustration your child may experience. Your child will benefit if everyone is consistent.

Choosing a school

What type of school?

All children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are different. Some difficulties can be quite mild and will get better with time; others are more severe and can be long-term. Some children's SLCN will be resolved by the time they start school. For those that are not, there are different choices, depending on how severe their needs are.

- Most children with SLCN go to mainstream school. They may need some extra help, either from the school or from other people who come into the school, such as a speech and language therapist (SLT). Some children have more severe SLCN and are described as having special educational needs (SEN). They will have additional help provided by the local authority, for example teaching assistant support, speech and language therapy or specialist teaching support.
- Sometimes, children go to a school that has a special class for pupils with SLCN; this is often called a language resource, unit or base. These are usually part of a mainstream school and children usually need to be identified as having SEN, and have been through a formal assessment process, to go to this type of school.
- Children with very severe SLCN sometimes go to a special school that caters specifically for these needs. These are usually independent or non-maintained, i.e. not run by their local authority. A local authority will use this type of school if they are absolutely sure that a child cannot learn well in a local school or specialist provision. This school may not be in a child's local authority area and so there might be a long journey to school.
- Sometimes children with SLCN might go to a local authority special school that caters for a whole range of different special educational needs.

Parents and local authorities need to work together to get the right type of support for a child with SLCN. For many children with SLCN the most important thing is the type of support and not necessarily where it is. This means getting the right level of help in school, the right communication supportive learning environment and the right mix of professional support (such as speech and language therapy).

The way that local authorities help children with SLCN in school can be different depending on where you live. Talk to your local authority about what normally happens where you live. The [Parent Partnership Network](#) can tell you all about the different types of schools in your area.

If you want to talk to someone independently about the different school choices that your child will have, you can call the [Afasic](#) helpline for more information. The [I CAN](#) Enquiry Service has speech and language therapists available who you can talk to about the different options for children with SLCN.

The [Talking Point](#) website has lots of information on choosing the right school, including checklists about what a communication supportive environment should look like.

The process of choosing a school

The process of choosing a school can be challenging when your child has speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). You will have your own preferences about where you would like your child to go to school. All children with SLCN have different needs and this means there is no single answer about where they should go.

Choosing the school should involve the practitioners that know your child, for example their speech and language therapist, as well as you and the local authority. Key points about the process of choosing a school are:

- If your child's needs can be met in their local school without any additional help there will be no special process that you will need to go through.
- Some children with SLCN are considered to have special educational needs (SEN). This is when their SLCN gets in the way of their learning. Children with SEN will have different types and levels of support depending on how severe their needs are.
- If your child is likely to need extra support they will need assessments to be done and reports to be written to describe their needs. This information is brought together and your child's needs are described in a document – currently called a statement of special educational needs. In 2014 this is going to change to become an education, health and care plan.
- You will need to work with the local authority to agree about the best school to meet the needs your child has.

The process of finding the right school can be confusing and may take a long time. Sometimes, if you do not agree with the local authority, it can be very challenging. There are a number of organisations that can help with guiding you through this. [Network 81](#), [IPSEA](#) and the [Parent Partnership Network](#) all offer independent advice. You can get information about the special educational needs process from the [Gov.uk](#) website.

The [Afasic](#) helpline and [I CAN](#) Enquiry Service offer opportunities to talk to someone about the process of finding the right school.

Home-school communication

When a child has speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) it is really important that regular communication happens between home and school. A child with SLCN might not be able to tell their teacher about something that has happened at home, or tell their parent carer about their day at school.

It is helpful to have a clear route of communication set up between home and school to make sure that messages can be passed on. This could be a home-school communication book, a very quick meeting at the end of the day or a phone call to pass on information. This will mean that you will understand what your child has done each day, and will be able to talk to them about it.

Working with professionals

The best support for a child with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) happens when the professionals that work with a child, and their parent carer, have good communication. Make sure reports are shared and information passed on to all the people that need it. If you have any questions or queries, just ask. The professionals that work with your child should always be happy to talk to you about your concerns.

School Years

Getting started

Often children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) have their difficulties identified at a young age. When a child's SLCN are very obvious, or they have difficulties in more than one area of their development, their SLCN can be identified and support put into place.

However for some children and young people, their SLCN might not become obvious until they are older. Some children manage to cope with nursery, but find primary school and its additional demands very challenging. At this point, their parents or teachers may realise that a child has some kind of SLCN.

Some young people don't have their SLCN identified until they are at secondary school. They may have been able to use strategies and hidden their difficulties through the earlier part of their schooling but the greater demands of the curriculum in secondary school highlights the difficulties they have learning and using language.

If you have concerns about your child's speech, language and communication development discuss it with staff at their school, or ask to meet with the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo). They see many children as part of their daily working lives and this can help clarify whether the concerns you have are reasonable. It may be that a child's difficulties are identified first by their school if they are struggling to learn, socialise or communicate there.

If you think your child has difficulties you and your child's school will need to find out about their SLCN. You can do this by:

- talking to each other about the areas that you think your child is finding difficult
- asking for an assessment by a speech and language therapist
- using checklists and milestones information to help you to work out where your child is having difficulties. See [Afasic](#), [The Communication Trust](#) and [Talking Point](#) for more information on communication checklists

A speech and language therapist is a professional with expert knowledge of speech, language and communication development. You can refer your child to them yourself, or you can ask your school to refer. They may assess your child in a clinic, although very often they will arrange to visit a child at school. A speech and language therapist will:

- talk to parents and school staff about their concerns
- observe a child in a classroom to see what their communication skills are like
- assess a child. This may take the form of formal assessment or informal assessment, depending on the child and the type of difficulties they have.

Other people who might get involved are:

- an advisory teacher (an experienced teacher with expertise in special educational needs, who can advise on ways to support children who require extra or additional help)
- an educational psychologist, who can assess other areas of a child's development and learning ability
- a paediatrician, who is a doctor who treats children. Some paediatricians specialise in children with developmental disorders

In some cases, additional support may be put in by the school for a period of time before they decide to refer to specialist services. Some children may respond well and their SLCN can continue to be supported by the school without any extra help.

General information

Everyday life

Over one million children and young people in the UK have some kind of speech language and communication needs (SLCN). This doesn't mean they cannot live happy and fulfilling lives. Children and young people with SLCN can join in family activities, social events and clubs and participate in many of the things that all children enjoy.

However, a child's SLCN has can mean that they struggle in various ways. Different children will find different things difficult; it depends on the type of SLCN they have.

Children of primary school age might have the following types of difficulties:

Understanding language

- they may find it hard to learn and understand the meanings of words
- they might find it hard to understand things that aren't happening right now
- they might follow just part of an instruction, usually the beginning or end
- they might be slow to respond or answer questions
- they can find it hard to listen and pay attention when someone is talking

Using language

- they often use short sentences, missing words out. Their sentences can sound muddled because they put words in the wrong order
- they might make up words, or say general words like 'thingy' a lot because they can't remember the right word
- they can struggle with written work as well as speaking. They might find it hard to make up stories or join their ideas in a sensible way

- they might be difficult to understand if their speech is a problem

Social skills

- they find it hard to join in games. They might not understand the rules of the game, or know how to ask to join in
- they find it hard to follow lots of language and so conversations can be difficult, especially in groups
- they may play alone because they find it difficult to use language to negotiate with others

You can help by:

- Always saying their name before you ask them to do something or give an instruction. This will help them to know that you are talking to them which means that they can listen better.
- Help them to understand by giving shorter instructions, and leaving a bit of time for them to think about what you've said and give a response.
- Check that they have understood. You could ask them a couple of questions, for example *"Where are you going to put it?"* to make sure that they know what you have asked them to do.
- Give them good models to copy rather than correct what they have said, by repeating back what they said right way. It can also be helpful to add another word or two to their sentence to help them develop their talking, for example if they said *"That cat sitting"* you could say *"Yes, that cat is sitting in the tree."*
- Help them learn skills that will support them to join in games with other children, for example taking turns in games, listening to what others have said. You can do this by playing any games that you might have at home.

Secondary aged children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) might have the following difficulties:

Understanding language

- They might take a long time to answer when someone speaks to them
- They can have difficulty understanding the complicated vocabulary used at school
- They may mis-understand more complicated sentences, for example *"Before you make your conclusion, consider all the evidence presented during the hearing"*
- They might understand things very literally, for example *"pull your socks up"*

Using language

- Their sentences may sound odd, or immature and their vocabulary use can be limited
- They can have difficulty with reading and writing as well as with talking

Learning and social skills

- They can find social situations difficult, particularly things like listening to others ideas and keeping up with conversations
- They may behave in a way that can seem naughty or challenging, because of the frustration they experience
- They can find it hard to organise themselves, for example getting the stuff they need for school together or getting to a social event on time
- They may have difficulties with remembering information or instructions heard
- They may find it hard to 'think things through' and to come up with solutions

Making sense of the world:

- They may find it hard to interpret information flexibly and can be very literal.
- They might have difficulties with understanding how ideas and concepts relate together, for example that 'outbreak', 'disaster', 'epidemic' all relate to the concept of 'pandemic'.
- They may 'home in' on specific details and not see how these fit into the overall picture.

You can help by:

- Making sure that you give them time to think about what you have said. They will probably need longer than most people to process information, so try and leave a few seconds for them to reply.
- Try to avoid tricky parts of language, like idioms, "*I'm all ears*" or metaphors, like "*Life is a journey*" because they make language even more confusing for them.
- Encourage them to tell you when they have not understood what you have said and help them to work out which bits were difficult.
- Be honest. If you haven't understood what they have said, say so and try to work it out between you.
- Talk through strategies that will help them to organise themselves, and help them to practise using these.

Playing

Playing is one of the main ways of making friends and maintaining friendships. After pre-school years, children's play increasingly involves talking, imagination and interacting with others. Their understanding of different games and their ability to stick to the rules becomes more important. As well as language skills, play continues to involve physical and organisational skills.

Some children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) may have difficulties with these play skills. The difficulties they have can make it harder for them to make friends and to maintain friendships.

Sometimes children and young people with SLCN have relative strengths in a particular sport or activity. These may offer good opportunities for them to play and interact with others as they feel more confident. Adults can try to help children by making sure they have the chance to take part in these types of activities.

Lots of activities and games have clear rules, and many children and young people with SLCN may find these easier to take part in compared to 'talking' activities. However, they may need more clear explanation and/or demonstration about the rules to make sure they have understood.

Home environment

Children are at home for most of their time. You might see that your child's speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) cause some difficulties at home. They might:

- find it hard to follow the everyday routines, or struggle if these are changed
- get frustrated if they can't tell you what they want, or can't understand what is happening. This might mean that they show difficult behaviour or act in a naughty way
- play on their own because they find it hard to join in games with their siblings or friends
- avoid situations where they need to talk to you, or find it hard to join in conversations where lots of people are talking at once

Children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) need more time to think and to plan what to say. They may also need more time to organise themselves. Therefore, a quiet calm environment is likely to be helpful.

You can try these things at home to help your child with SLCN in the home environment:

- turn off/ turn down background music or TV, especially when talking
- encourage siblings to take turns to talk
- give plenty of notice about getting ready for something that is going to happen

- make use of drawings, photos, pictures, shopping lists, calendars, 'to do' lists, things to pack for an outing, to help your child understand or plan for themselves. They may be more motivated to do this using electronic devices like an I pad or computer
- silence is OK when it gives your child time to organize their thoughts so don't feel that someone needs to be talking all the time
- don't ask too many questions, your child doesn't want to feel interrogated. Try asking them open questions like "*what was the best thing you liked about today*" rather than ones that only need a yes/no answer
- demonstrate good listening skills yourself and make sure that you have plenty of opportunity to do this in your day. This shows that you really are interested in what they say
- use opportunities for chatting, like mealtimes, to make sure everyone gets a chance to talk, including you
- help by explaining any words or phrases that they don't understand
- work out strategies that help them with communication, for example 'rehearsing' what people have said so they can remember and practice in their head

Choices and challenges

Friendships

Many children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), have difficulties with making friends and/or maintaining friendships.

At school and at home, people around the child or young person with SLCN can help in lots of ways:

- Make sure there are opportunities to play and work in pairs or small groups.
- Encourage different ways of taking part in the games and activities that don't involve talking for example props, body movements and facial expressions.
- Inviting friends over. A child or young person may be more confident and talkative at home, and you can help them to prepare by talking through possible games and activities they can do.
- Helping them with strategies for joining in games or starting conversations that they can use outside of home.
- Helping them to join in schools activities and clubs. A shared interest between the children and young people at the club may be a good starting point for new friendships.

Coping with difficulties

Children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) may not be aware that they have difficulties and that they may come across as being 'different'. Others may know that they are different but find it difficult to explain in detail or talk about their feelings.

Sometimes children and young people with SLCN can misunderstand other people's actions or intentions. Or, their clumsiness with talking can come across as being insulting or rude when they don't mean to be.

Sometimes children are teased or bullied because they are different. Children and young people with SLCN can have difficulties with working out what is nasty teasing from friendly banter or jokes.

At home and at school, the following could be helpful:

- be aware of changes in your child's behaviour or normal routines
- chat regularly with him/her to find out what's going on generally – not just when something seems to be wrong
- talk to school staff about having a 'tell-friendly' environment where they are encouraged to talk about any problems at school. Ensure this information is then passed on to home
- make sure your child knows how to ask for help - talking through helpful phrases like "*I had a problem at school*" might be a good idea
- identify a key person that your child can go to to talk through problems they may be having. This could be a family member or another trusted adult
- look into any problems your child says they are having. They may need adult support to help them understand or to resolve difficult situations

You can get more advice and information about friendships and difficulties such as bullying from [Family Lives](#) and [Kidscape](#).

Developing independence

Children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) may lack general confidence, especially when talking. Some can have additional difficulties with organising themselves for activities or outings. This can affect the development of their independence skills.

They might be reluctant to 'have a go' at activities that they think are difficult. They might prefer to rely on others to do things or to speak for them. Familiar people can sometimes be keen to help too readily which can affect the way a child or young person learns to be independent.

At home and at school, the following could be helpful to develop independence skills:

- Set realistic but high expectations for your child and let them know what these are in a way that they understand.
- Give praise for having a “*good try*” and for working hard at it.
- Build on your child’s strengths and interests; they will be more confident with these.
- Make sure that they understand the instructions, and demonstrate what to do where you can.
- Encourage your child to ‘have a go’ before giving them help. Don’t offer help if they don’t need it but help them to prepare beforehand if you are able to.
- Try starting the task together before handing it over to them.
- Visual reminders may be useful for example preparing a checklist of what to pack for school, a ‘to do’ list for the weekend etc.
- Siblings or friends may be able to pair up to help them work independently. Encourage them not to take over!

What if things aren’t working?

If you have concerns about your child, hopefully the school staff or SENCo (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) will work closely with you. Sometimes, this may not be the case.

If your child has speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) you may face difficulties with:

- School and/or the local authority having a different view about the nature or extent of their difficulties.
- School and/or the local authority having a different view about the level of additional support they need.
- School and/or the local authority having a different view about the progress your child is making.
- A long waiting list for specialist assessment (e.g. speech and language therapist, educational psychologist).
- School and/or your local authority disagreeing with your request for statutory assessment of special educational needs (SEN). This is a detailed assessment of a child’s needs based on specialist advice that decides what type of support they need. The [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website has more information.

The SENCo should be able to show reports over a period of time that track your child’s progress. It is important to try and work closely with your child’s school if at all possible to ensure they get the best support. You may find it helpful to contact the local authority

yourself. For further information, see the [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website or contact your local [Parent Partnership](#) advisor.

You might want to talk to someone independently about any difficulties you are having. The [Afasic](#) helpline provides information and support, and the [I CAN](#) Enquiry Service offers the chance to talk to a speech and language therapist about SLCN and schools.

Choosing a secondary school

The process of choosing a secondary school can be difficult for all parents but especially for parents with children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Your child may wish to go to a particular school along with most of his/her friends. Your child may or may not be able to go to the local secondary school; it depends on the needs that they have.

All children with SLCN have different needs and this means there is no single answer about where they should go to school. Children with SLCN may go to their local secondary school, a speech and language resource attached to a mainstream school, or a specialist school for children with SLCN. It depends on the type and severity of their difficulties, the feelings of parents, school staff and other professionals and what is available in their local area.

Discuss with the school staff and other professionals working with your child (for example a speech and language therapist if they see one,) about the type of school or which schools best meet his/her needs. Your local authority can give guidance about choosing a secondary school. For parents with children with SLCN, start your preparation early to look into and visit different secondary schools. You can get information to compare different schools from:

- the local authority
- school website and prospectus
- school OFSTED reports
- children/ parents of children attending the school
- school visits – open days and/or make individual arrangements
- meeting with the Head of Inclusion/Learning Support department
- other professions with knowledge about the school e.g. a speech and language therapist if your child sees one

The involvement that your child has with choosing a secondary school will vary greatly between individuals; some children are more able to input than others. During your research into different schools, think about the following when finding out about the school and how your child's SLCN will be helped:

- the size of the school

- how is the school organised? Some schools may be divided into 'smaller schools' for KS3 (Year 7/8/9)
- the size of class groups for different ability groups
- how the tutor groups are organised e.g. mixed year groups
- does each young person have a 'key worker'?
- is there additional staff support for some subject classes/ ability groups?
- how does the school identify/keep an eye on young people who are struggling? What additional support is available?
- during break and lunchtime, how are young people supervised? Is there a 'quiet room' for them?
- what organised lunchtime activities are there?
- are there staggered times for young people in the canteen?
- what training do school staff get in SLCN issues?
- which members of staff have specialist training in SLCN?
- how much/ what input is there from other professionals e.g. speech and language therapist?
- how will your child's Statement of SEN be met (if they have one)?

There are a number of organisations that can help with guiding you through this. [Network 81](#), [IPSEA](#) and the [Parent Partnership Network](#) all offer independent advice. You can get information about the special educational needs process from the [Gov.uk](#) website. The [Afasic](#) helpline and [I CAN](#) Enquiry Service offer opportunities to talk to someone about the process of finding the right school.

Preparing for the transfer

It is really important to prepare all young people for their transfer to secondary school to minimise their anxiety. This can be even more important for those with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Each local authority has its own guidelines about the transfer process but what each school provides can be different according to where you live. In your research about different schools, find out about what's available and whether additional support can be put in place if needed, for example extra visits to the school before starting.

In addition to the primary school staff, other professionals working with your child may be also be directly involved with their transfer process, for example an advisory teacher or speech and language therapist (although not all young people will see these).

The following may be included in a transition plan:

- 'orientation' school visits
- 'taster' lessons
- meeting Year 7 students/ teachers
- visiting the Learning Inclusion department (if appropriate)
- secondary school 'link person' observing or working with children in their Year 6 classes

Some schools or supporting professionals (e.g. speech and language therapy) offer groups to help young people with the transfer to secondary school. They are supported to develop practical skills such as understanding the school timetable, using a (school) planner, asking for help, making friends or organising themselves. Ask if this type of support is available in your area.

There are some helpful publications you can look at to help with the transition from primary school to secondary school. [Afasic](#) and [The Communication Trust](#) both have information books specifically about helping to get this right.

Meeting others

Parent groups

It can be very helpful for parent carers to talk to other people whose children also have SLCN. [Afasic](#) have local groups that offer support; you can find out more from their website. Online forums may also be able to help you to locate local support groups, so it may be worth looking at places like Mumsnet for more information. [Contact a Family](#) and [The Parent Partnership Network](#) might also be able to put you in touch with local groups or organisations.

For many people, parent groups offer the opportunity to meet others who can relate to the experiences or challenges they face. Other parents may be able to give invaluable support and advice. Whilst no two children/ young people with SLCN are the same, the issues that parents face may be similar such as managing their child's anxieties, building friendship and getting support in school.

Going out with your child

Some young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) rely on familiar routines and can get anxious with changes or unfamiliar activities. If this is the case, the following may be helpful:

- give lots of notice about outings or new activities – use a calendar and verbal reminders

- where possible, give information about the unfamiliar place or activity for example going to Alton Towers
- jointly plan what you'll be doing there
- encourage your child to ask any questions or to voice their worries about the outing
- encourage your child to pack all the things he/she needs for the outing

Some young people with SLCN are reluctant to speak to unfamiliar people or in public. When out with your child, there may be opportunities to encourage him/her to make requests or to find out information, for example *"Have you got this in size 3?"*, *"What time does Diary of a Wimpy Kid finish?"* Sometimes, you may well know the answer but encourage your child to ask someone anyway.

As your child gets older, you may want to encourage him/her to 'go off' independently and to meet up again during an outing. The following things might be helpful:

- be clear about where and when to meet up
- it may be easier to read accurately a digital clock than an analogue one for example - *"It's 11.30 now. Meet me back here at 12.15."*
- both you and your child carry a mobile phone so that you can get in touch. Make sure the numbers they need are stored and they know how to get to them
- check that your child understands/ remembers the instructions. You could ask them to repeat them to you to make sure
- check that your child has all the items needed for the task for example money and map of Alton Towers

Into adulthood

Getting started

Occasionally it may be that a young person reaches early adulthood before their speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are identified. A young person may have used hiding strategies or coping strategies for many years before they, or someone that knows them well, realises that they have some form of SLCN.

A young person themselves may request an assessment, as they realise the problems they are having. Or their parent carer or a familiar adult or friend might help them to realise that they are struggling and need to get some help.

A speech and language therapist will be able to assess a young person and may help them to identify what is causing their difficulties. They may show that they:

- Find it hard to follow conversations, especially those involving several people.
- Struggle to start conversations with other people either because they can't find the right words or language or they are anxious about the social part of the interaction.
- Take a long time to process information, or need to have information repeated so that they can follow it.
- Misunderstand what someone is saying, especially if they are using more complicated language like double meanings or idioms.
- Struggle to put together long pieces of information so that their language sounds muddled or disorganised.

The local speech and language therapy service may be able to offer an assessment; a young person can get in touch with them directly to find out the best way to get an assessment done. Their GP will be able to give them the details of their local service. It is important that whoever does the assessment is familiar with the features of speech, language and communication in young people and adults.

If no speech and language service is available locally they could get a private speech and language therapy assessment done but this, of course, comes at a cost. There is more information on private assessment available on the [ASLTIP](#) website.

Think about the future

A young person with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) will have a whole range of different options available to them as they think about the future. The following things might be helpful to think about as you help them plan ahead.

Person centred planning

Person-centred planning (PCP) is a set of approaches designed to help someone to plan their life and the support that they need. It can be used as a life planning model to help young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) to increase their own independence and set their own goals.

The **Afasic** Leading My Life project has more information about PCP and its role with young people with SLCN.

College and work options

A young person with SLCN may want to go to college or university or straight into work, depending on their skills and interests and the type of difficulties they have.

The following things might be helpful:

- Talk to their school or college about what they think would be realistic to expect, and work with them to help them work out what their options are.
- Get some advice from the practitioners that know them. A speech and language therapist will be able to give you some guidance about what their strengths are, what their difficulties will be and how to help them.
- Ask for reports from practitioners and talk to the young person about them. This can help them decide what they would like to do. It will also help them to understand about their difficulties.
- Support them with interview skills and practise these if you can.
- Set up good communication systems with the college or place that they work if you possibly can. This will help them to understand the difficulties that the young person has and help to avoid any misunderstandings.

If you have a **Connexions** service in your local area, they can help you to find out about what the options are locally, and what help and support a young person is entitled to.

Leaving school

A young person with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) moving on from school faces many challenges. The following ideas may be helpful for preparing a young person for these:

- Help them to understand their difficulties themselves. Teachers and familiar adults may be able to help a young person to understand what their strengths are, what their difficulties are and the impact of these. They will find it much easier to tackle life if they understand what their SLCN means for them.

- Gather some easily accessible information about their SLCN from a speech and language therapist or other person that understands their needs. A report or summary of their needs may help them to explain their difficulties to others.
- Support them with interview skills and techniques, so that they have had practise and are prepared for interviews.
- Put them in touch with organisations that may be able to help them with training for work. For some young people with the most severe needs organisations like the Shaw Trust and Prospects can provide helpful information and support about careers and training to give them the best opportunities.
- Look for opportunities for supported working. The Realistic Opportunities for Supported Employment (ROSE) Project is an example of the types of organisations that can help young people with SLCN into work, although these services are not available everywhere.
- Help them to find opportunities for volunteering if finding a job is difficult. This will help them to build up skills and experience to include on a CV.
- Look for opportunities on local authority websites. They may be able to give a young person some information about where to go after school has finished.

Developing independence

Everyday life

It is very important for a young person with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) to develop independence in their everyday life. As parent carers this can cause anxieties.

The development of social media and the changes in the way young people communicate means that they have increasing opportunities for developing their independence. As parent carers it can be difficult to allow this independence when we feel a young person may be vulnerable.

The following things might be helpful:

- Ask another trusted adult to help a young person establish some independence if as parent carer you are finding it difficult. Young people can sometimes respond better to a different adult that they trust than to their parents.
- Try to provide opportunities for independence whenever you can. You can help to make these safe through supported opportunities, for example helping with part of a task, giving clear guidelines about what they can do, starting a task with them and then leaving them to continue.

- Encourage them to use a checklist of things they need whenever they are taking part in activities or going out. This means that they won't forget important things to take like their phone or money.
- Help them practice using money in real-life situations as young people with SLCN can find using money very difficult.

Social activities

Social activities are very important for all young people, including those with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). The following thoughts and ideas may be helpful for supporting a young person with this:

- Look for youth projects or groups that are experienced in supporting young people with SLCN. [Afasic](#) have some helpful resources aimed at helping youth workers understand about SLCN.
- Be aware that information from colleges, schools or youth services will not come directly to you as parent carers. Young people will get the information themselves; you need to work out with them how much information they need to pass on to you and how they will do it.
- Increase a young person's self awareness about how they can help themselves as they take part in social activities. This means helping them with things like planning and information sharing as well as developing their social interaction skills.
- Give them skills to help them make plans with other people. This might include how to store information on their phone, knowing how to search for information if they store it in the phone, using a calendar, having important numbers easily identifiable.
- Give them tips about safety. Encourage them to use something like the Young Person's Identity Card available from [Afasic](#) to help them if they are in difficulty.
- Work with them to help them manage compromise and frustration. Role play can be helpful to talk them through situations that they may encounter.

Letting go

As a parent, letting go as your child develops independence can be very difficult; this may be even harder if your child has speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

The following things might help to make this easier for you and your child:

- Help your child to develop their ability to make choices by presenting them with all the available options. Talk through the positives and negatives of the different options with them. Ultimately, the choices they make will be down to them.
- Support their independence by respecting the choices they make whenever you can.

- Really listen to them. Just because they have SLCN doesn't mean they don't know what they want or like to do.
- Be aware that they will probably not reach the different stages of maturity at the same age as their peers. This means, for example that they may reach teenage stages of emotional development at an older age. This might affect the choices that they make.
- If you are struggling to let go, you might find it helps to work through another family member, friend or trusted adult who is not so emotionally involved.
- Be aware of the rights that they have in terms of support. Organisations like [Afasic](#) and [Contact a Family](#) can provide information and advice about this. Contact local services to find out what additional support they can provide.

Top tips

- Use information about speech, language and communication development to help you understand how your child's skills are developing. Milestone information is available from [Talking Point](#), [The Communication Trust](#) and [I CAN](#).
- Ask for a speech and language therapy assessment if you are concerned about your child's speech, language and communication development. You can go directly to your local service or go through your GP or health visitor.
- Find out as much as you can about speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). You can find out lots of information from [Talking Point](#), [The Communication Trust](#), [I CAN](#) and [Afasic](#).
- Ask the practitioners that work with your child about how you can help them to develop their speech, language and communication skills. This might be their early years worker, teacher or other practitioner like their speech and language therapist.
- Try to communicate as much information as you can to everyone that knows or works with your child, including schools staff, friends and club leaders.
- Find out about the ways that children and young people with SLCN can be supported at school. [Talking Point](#) has information about getting the environment right for children and young people with SLCN. The [I CAN](#) Enquiry Service and [Afasic](#) helpline can also provide information about this.
- Build on your child's strengths and interests. Activities and clubs may be a good way to build up his/her confidence and to make friends.
- Use strategies to help your child in their everyday life. This might be visual reminders or cues like pictures or symbols, or communication strategies that you know work like giving choices instead of asking direct questions.
- Make sure your communication with your child is at the right level. Use short, simple language if you need to and give them time to respond.

Who can help

Sources of help and support

ACE Centre

For information on assistive technology and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).

Tel: 0161 358 0151

Web: www.ace-centre.org.uk

Afasic

Afasic is the UK charity established to help children and young people affected by the hidden disability of speech, language and communication impairments.

Enquiries: 020 7490 9410

UK helpline: 0845 355 55 77

Web: www.afasic.org.uk

British Stammering Association (BSA)

BSA is the national organisation for adults and children who stammer, run by people who stammer.

Tel: 020 8983 1003

Web: www.stammering.org

Contact a Family

Contact a Family is a national charity that offers support, advice and information to families of disabled children whatever their condition or disability.

Tel helpline: 0808 808 3555

Tel: 020 7608 8700

Web: www.cafamily.org.uk

Family Lives

Family Lives is a national charity providing help and support in all aspects of family life.

Tel: 020 7553 3080

Helpline: 0808 800 2222

Web: www.familylives.co.uk

I CAN

I CAN is the children's communication charity. I CAN's aim is to ensure that no child is left out or left behind because of a difficulty speaking or understanding.

Tel switchboard: 0845 225 4071 or 020 7843 2510

Tel information: 0845 225 4073 or 020 7843 2552

Web: www.ican.org.uk

IPSEA

A national charity providing free legally based advice to families who have children with special educational needs.

Tel: 0800 0184016

Web: www.ipsea.org.uk

Kidscape

Kidscape is an organisation committed to prevent bullying and to keep children safe from abuse.

Tel: 020 7730 3300

Helpline: 08451 205 204

Web: www.kidscape.org.uk

Network 81

A national network of parents working towards properly resourced inclusive education for all children with special needs.

Tel: 0845 0774055

Web: www.network81.org

Parent Partnership (PPS)

Parent Partnership Services are statutory services offering information advice and support to parents and carers of children and young people with special educational needs (SEN).

Tel: 020 7843 6058

Web: www.parentpartnership.org.uk

Prospects

Prospects is an education, employment and training company, working both nationally and internationally.

Tel: 020 8315 1500

Web: www.prospects.co.uk

Shaw Trust

Shaw Trust is a national charity which supports disabled and disadvantaged people to prepare for work, find jobs and live more independently.

Tel: 01225 716300

Web: www.shaw-trust.org.uk

SOSSEN

SOSSEN offer a free, friendly, independent and confidential telephone helpline for parents and others looking for information and advice on Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Tel: 0208 5383731

Web: www.sossen.org.uk

The Communication Trust

The Communication Trust is a coalition of nearly 50 voluntary and community organisations with expertise in speech, language and communication. They harness their collective expertise to support the children's workforce and commissioners to support the communication needs of all children and young people, particularly those with SLCN.

Tel: 0207 843 2526

Web: www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

Resources

General resources

To understand speech and language development:

- [Talking Point](#) website
- Stages of Speech & Language Development Poster (from [I CAN](#) website)
- Small Talk (available from [The Communication Trust](#))
- What's typical talk at Primary? (available from [I CAN](#))
- What's typical talk at secondary? (available from [I CAN](#))

To support speech and language development:

Books:

- 'Babytalk' by Sally Ward (Arrow)

Websites:

- Stoke Speaks Out (a multi-agency project to look at the issues underlying children's language deficits in Stoke on Trent) www.stokespeaksout.org
- Coventry Talk Now www.coventrytalknow.co.uk
- [Talking Point](#) website www.talkingpoint.org.uk

Resources:

- Speech and language development activity books (available from [Afasic](#))
- The following I CAN resources (available from the [I CAN](#) website):
 - Chatter Matters
 - Ready Steady Talk
 - Babbling Babies
 - Toddler Talk
 - Chatting with Children
 - Communication Cookbook

DVDs:

- Sookie and Finn DVD
- Oxbridge Baby - Learn to Talk

To understand speech, language and communication needs:

- Misunderstood (available from [The Communication Trust](#))
- Other Ways of Speaking (available from [The Communication Trust](#))
- The SLI Handbook (available from [Afasic](#) and [I CAN](#))
- Afasic Glossary Sheets (available from [Afasic](#))
- 'The Parent's Guide to Speech and Language Problems' By Debbie Feit (McGraw-Hill Contemporary)
- 'Childhood Speech, Language and Listening Problems: What Every Parent Should Know' By Patricia McAleer Hamaguchi (John Wiley & Sons).
- 'Can I tell you about Selective Mutism?' by Maggie Johnson and Alison Wintgens is (Jessica Kingsley)

Supporting speech, language and communication needs:

The following resources for supporting speech, language and communication needs are available from [Afasic](#):

- The Parent's Voice: Advocating for your Child
- Transfer to Secondary School: Moving on Moving up
- 'Watch Your Language'
- Choosing a school
- Handy Hints
- Planning for life after 16

[The Communication Trust](#) have a range of downloadable booklets for staff supporting children with speech, language and communication needs.

To explain speech, language and communication to children:

- Teddy Talk! By Nicola Botting (Able)

Activities for children and young people:

- BT free communication skills resources
www.btplc.com/Responsiblebusiness/Supportingourcommunities/Learningandskills/Freeresources/Default.aspx

Useful organisations and websites

Association of Speech and Language Therapists in Independent Practice (ASLTIP)

The Association of Speech and Language Therapists in Independent Practice (ASLTIP) provides information and a contact point for members of the public searching for a private Speech and Language Therapist

Tel: 01494 488306

Web: www.helpwithtalking.com

Afasic

Afasic is the UK charity established to help children and young people affected by the hidden disability of speech, language and communication impairments

Enquiries: 020 7490 9410

UK helpline: 0845 355 55 77

Web: www.afasic.org.uk

Apraxia Kids

Apraxia Kids is an American website offering information and resources for parents and professionals working with children with apraxia/ dyspraxia (of speech).

Web: www.apraxia-kids.org

Communication Matters

A national voluntary organisation of members concerned with augmentative and alternative communications.

Tel: 0845 456 8211

Web: www.communicationmatters.org.uk

Connexions

Providing information and advice to young people and to parents on education, work and other life issues such as housing, money and relationships.

To find your local Connexion Service, carry out a web search on 'Connexions' together with your local area e.g. 'Connexions Manchester'.

Gov.uk

The government's information website.

Web: www.gov.uk

I CAN

I CAN is the children's communication charity. I CAN's aim is to ensure that no child is left out or left behind because of a difficulty speaking or understanding.

Tel switchboard: 0845 225 4071 or 020 7843 2510

Tel information: 0845 225 4073 or 020 7843 2552

Web: www.ican.org.uk

The Makaton Charity

Resources and training for parents, carers and professionals for using Makaton signs and symbols.

Tel: 01276 606760

Web: www.makaton.org

NAPLIC

NAPLIC is an organisation for teachers, speech and language therapists and other professionals that exists to promote and increase the awareness and understanding of children and young people with speech, language and communication needs, amongst all the professionals involved in meeting their needs.

Web: www.naplic.org.uk

Selective Mutism Information and Research Association (SMIRA)

SMIRA raises awareness about selective mutism. It provides information and resources, also there is a forum for debates and queries.

Web: www.smira.org.uk

Signalong

Signalong is a registered charity which provides resources and training in visual communication based on British Sign Language

Web: www.signalong.org.uk

Talk to your baby

Talk to your baby is a national campaign to encourage parents and carers to talk more to children aged 0-3. Websites have information and resources to develop interaction, communication and language skills in pre-school aged children.

For parents

Web: www.wordsforlife.org.uk

For professionals

Web: www.literacytrust.org.uk/talktoyourbaby

Talking Point

Talking Point is a website all about children's speech, language and communication.

Web: www.talkingpoint.org.uk

The Communication Trust

The Communication Trust is a coalition of nearly 50 voluntary and community organisations with expertise in speech, language and communication. They harness their collective expertise to support the children's workforce and commissioners to support the communication needs of all children and young people, particularly those with SLCN.

Enquiries tel: 0207 843 2526

Web: www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

Glossary

Articulation - Movement of the lips, tongue, teeth, and palate into specific patterns for speech.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication - Any method that can be used to support spoken communication. Often known as AAC.

Comprehension - Understanding of spoken and written language.

Disorder - Child is functioning below their age, but not following normal patterns of development.

Dyspraxia - A condition where children have difficulty in making and co-ordinating the precise movements their mouths need to make for clear speech.

Expressive language - Language we use for communication.

Idioms - Short phrases used in a particular way, that cannot be interpreted and understood literally. For example *"Hit the roof"* and *"Your room is like a pigsty."*

Non-verbal communication - Communication that does not include words or talking for example facial expression or body language.

Phonological disorder - Describes difficulties with making the sounds for speech. A child with phonological disorder will have speech which sounds like that of a child much younger than them, or that sound muddled. They might make errors that are unusual, and don't follow expected patterns.

Phonology - The way sounds are can be used and combined to produce speech. Children with delayed phonology might make errors such as saying *"d"* instead of *"s"*, so say *"dun"* instead of *"sun"*.

Pragmatic Difficulties - Difficulties in using language. A child with pragmatic difficulties may have difficulty understanding other people's language and behaviour, and may have problems using appropriate language for the setting.

SENCo - Special educational needs coordinator.

Speech and language therapist - Someone with specialist skills in understanding and developing speech, language and communications skills.

Receptive language - Understanding and comprehension of spoken and written language. A child with receptive language difficulties will find it hard to understand the words and sentences that others are saying to them.

Social interaction - The ways that we interact with others in a social way, for example in conversations.

Social Skills - Skills important for interacting socially with others for example eye contact, turn-taking.

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) - Problems learning and using speech, language and/or communication.

Early Support

for children, young people and families

www.ncb.org.uk/earllysupport

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