



**The Communication Trust**  
Every child understood

# Don't Get Me Wrong

Information for supporting children and young people with speech, language and communication needs



This booklet is for anyone working with children and young people, who have some understanding of speech, language and communication needs but would like more information.

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## Section 1: All about speech, language and communication needs



The following information explains what speech, language and communication needs are.

# Introduction

Almost everything we do involves speech, language and communication. Being able to make our needs known, expressing our likes and dislikes, interacting with others and building relationships are life skills we cannot afford to be without. Yet so many of us take these skills for granted. For some children and young people these skills are much harder to grasp and develop than for others; they have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

Children and young people with SLCN have various difficulties with speech, language and communication which might include their ability to interact with others, manage their emotions and access the curriculum. Up to 10% of all children will have long-term, persistent SLCN<sup>1</sup>. They may need direct and specific teaching with the involvement of a speech and language therapist (SLT) and / or specialist teacher in order to make progress. Support and understanding from those around them is crucial.

Difficulties with speech, language and communication can impact on:

- Being able to understand what's happening and take part in lessons
- Learning to read and write
- Being able to think things through
- Being able to manage your feelings

Every child or young person with SLCN is different, so it is often useful to look at the nature and impact of their difficulties rather than any labels they may have. SLCN is also common in children and young people who may have other diagnoses such as an autism spectrum disorder and learning difficulties, so SLCN is also considered in these contexts. However many children with SLCN may not have been identified at all.

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<sup>1</sup> Law et al (2000) *Provision for children's speech and language needs in England and Wales: facilitating communication between education and health services* DfES research report 239

## **A social model**

The Communication Trust follows a social model of disability – that is, one which recognises that any impairments that children and young people may have do not have to be disabling if those around them understand their needs, and are able to remove the barriers that get in the way of learning and wellbeing. For us it is more important to understand each child's individual needs than to attach a label or diagnosis.

We recognise, however, that a label or diagnosis can help families in their journey towards understanding their child's needs, and that children can often be liberated by knowing that their difficulties are 'not their fault'.

Diagnostic labels can be less helpful when people make assumptions about what needs a child with a particular diagnosis may have. Many children with SLCN do not, and never will have, a formal diagnosis. Many others will have SLCN that may be missed or misunderstood if people only focus on their given diagnosis. This booklet explains SLCN and the links between SLCN and named impairments and difficulties. Some of these impairments and difficulties will often come with a formal diagnosis, such as cerebral palsy or dyslexia, whilst others will be a description of need, such as moderate learning difficulties or literacy difficulties.

The Communication Trust recognises the challenges that both parents and school staff have in negotiating a wide range of labels and terms. *Don't Get Me Wrong* aims to help staff and parents better understand how a child's diagnosis may or may not link to their SLCN. There are also stories of a number of young people and information on how staff can support the children and young people in their setting.



## SLCN can include the following difficulties with speech

- Speech which is difficult to understand, which might include difficulty in making different sounds
- Problems discriminating between speech sounds, so 'catch' and 'cat' or 'conscious' and 'conscience' might sound the same
- Stammering or stuttering where sounds or words are repeated or may be difficult to produce without effort
- An unusual and persistently harsh or unusual voice quality
- Difficulty using intonation to add to the meaning of what's been said

## SLCN can include the following difficulties with language

- Using sentence structures more appropriate for someone younger, for example, 'me got them' at four years of age
- Problems linking sentences with words such as 'and', 'but', 'so', 'then'
- Difficulty sequencing sentences to make a meaningful narrative such as explanations and stories
- Problems learning new words
- Difficulty finding the right words at the right time. This is also known as 'word finding' difficulties
- Limited vocabulary for emotions, thoughts or feelings as this impacts on the curriculum
- Difficulty understanding complex sentences. For example, someone with SLCN might misunderstand the statement 'the boy was kicked by the girl' and think that the boy did the kicking
- Difficulty understanding idioms such as 'don't hit the roof'



## SLCN can include the following difficulties with communication

- Limited eye contact
- Poor turn taking and difficulty with starting and ending conversations
- Problems getting the conversation back on track after two people have talked at once, or if there has been a misunderstanding between them
- Difficulty understanding or responding to feedback from the listener. For example, not noticing when someone is bored or doesn't understand something
- Difficulty staying on topic in conversation
- Problems using language to negotiate in discussions or arguments

A child or young person with SLCN could have difficulties with speech, language and communication in any combination at varying degrees of difficulty.

Information on checklists to help identify SLCN are provided in the Supporting SLCN section and in appendix 1.

## How many children have speech, language and communication needs?

In some parts of the UK, particularly in areas of social disadvantage, upwards of 50% of children are starting school with SLCN<sup>2</sup>. Some of these children may catch up with the rest of their class given the right support. However there is also evidence that these difficulties can persist throughout their school career for the children who do not.

It is estimated that 10% of all children have long term or persistent SLCN. This includes:

- 7% of children have SLCN as their main difficulty, this is also referred to as specific language impairment (SLI)<sup>3</sup>
- 3% of children who have SLCN as part of another condition such as autism, hearing impairment, general learning difficulties etc.
- Of these children an estimated 1% of children have the most severe and complex SLCN which prevent them from expressing their basic needs.<sup>4</sup>

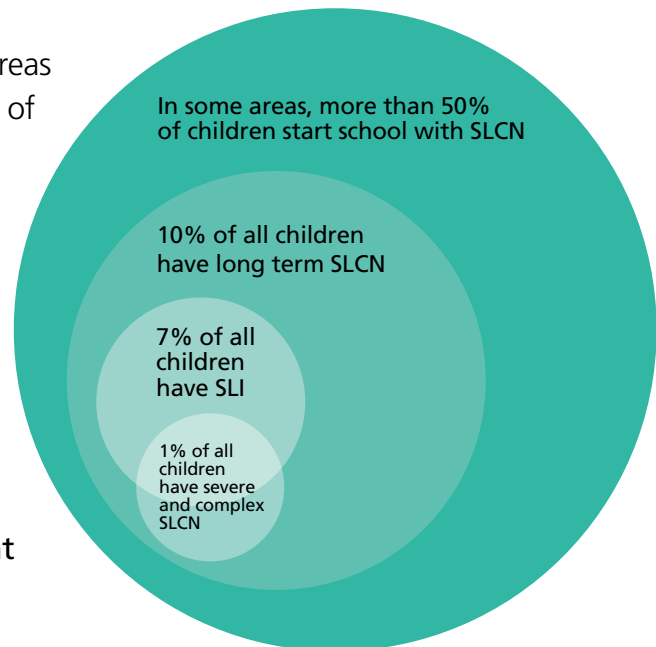


Figure 1. Prevalence of SLCN

Special educational need (SEN) data is collated by schools and based predominantly on pupils' primary special educational need. Educators therefore will classify children and young people as fitting into one of the SEN categories, for example, autism spectrum disorder. Although SLCN is one of the classification categories and children can be identified as having SLCN as a primary need, we know that children in the majority of the other SEN categories will have associated SLCN.

This means that there are many children who may have SLCN, but who are not recorded as such. The actual numbers of children with SLCN therefore may be significantly higher than suggested by data collated on primary SEN.

<sup>2</sup> Locke, A., Ginsborg, J., and Peers, I., (2002) *Development and Disadvantage: Implications for Early Years* IJLCD Vol 27 No 1  
<sup>3</sup> Tomblin, J., B., et al (1997) *Prevalence of Specific Language Impairment in Kindergarten Children* *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research* 40 and Lindsay, G., and Dockrell, J., with Mackie, C., and Letchford, B., (2002) *Educational Provision for Children with Specific Speech and Language Difficulties in England and Wales* CEDAR

# Which groups of children are likely to have SLCN

SLCN cuts across labels and diagnoses, so many children and young people who have other SEN labels or diagnoses also have SLCN. There are some groups of children and young people who are at much higher risk than others, for example:

- All children with SLI have SLCN which is often severe and complex – there is no obvious reason or cause for these difficulties with language, and their non verbal skills are often well developed.
- All children with learning difficulties have SLCN. This affects 3% of all children<sup>5</sup>.
- All children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), which includes Asperger syndrome, have SLCN. They have difficulty with social interaction and social communication. This affects 1% of all children<sup>6</sup>.

Other children are at increased risk of SLCN, including those with:

**Dyslexia** - a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling. Typical features are difficulties in: phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed, for example being able to break words down into individual sounds or parts which rhyme.

**Dyspraxia (or developmental co-ordination disorder)** - a difficulty with planning a sequence of co-ordinated movements which can affect speech.

Dyspraxia is also known as Developmental Verbal Dyspraxia. There might be difficulties with making speech sounds and sequencing sounds and words appropriately, and consistently. For example 'butterfly' might be produced as 'bubberdy' then 'duttebye.'

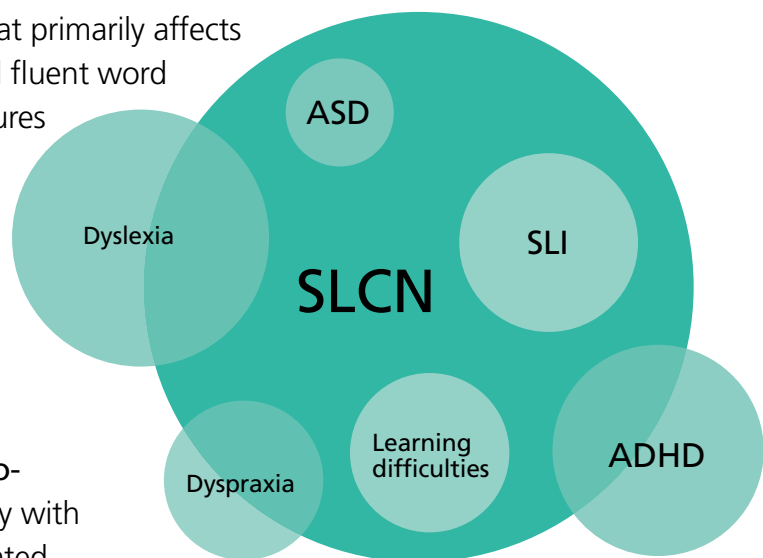


Figure 2. Groups of young people who are likely to have SLCN

4 Lindsay, G., et al (2008) *Effective and Efficient Use of Resources in Services for Children and Young People with Speech, Language and Communication Needs* DCSF Research Report RW05

5 Mencap, [www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)

6 Baird, G., Simonoff, E., Pickles, A., Chandler, S., Loucas, T., Meldrum, D., Charman, T., (2006) *Prevalence of disorders of the autism spectrum in a population cohort of children in South Thames: the Special Needs and Autism Project (SNAP)* *Lancet*, 15;368(9531):210-5

**Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)** - where a child has very poor attention, is overactive and impulsive in all situations and where this has a negative impact on their functioning. It occurs in about 8% of all children<sup>7</sup>, approximately 50% of these children have some form of SLCN<sup>8</sup>.

**Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD)** – children with BESD are at an increased risk of SLCN, and it often goes undetected in this group<sup>9</sup>.

Children who have English as an additional language (EAL) are at no greater risk of SLCN than any other group. The incidence of SLCN in children with EAL is the same as children with just one language; however, there can be challenges in identifying the SLCN of children who are learning EAL.

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7 Alloway, T., Elliott, J., Holmes, J., (2010) *The Prevalence of AD(H)D-Like Symptoms in a Community Sample* J Atten Disord, [Epub ahead of print]

8 Tannock, R., & Schachar, R., (1996) *Executive function as an underlying mechanism of behavior and language problems in Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder* and Beitchman, J.H., Cohen, N., Konstantareas, M.M., & Tannock, R., (Eds.) *Language, Learning, and Behaviour Disorders: Developmental, Biological, and Clinical Perspectives* (pp. 128–155). New York: Cambridge University Press

9 Ketelaars, M.P., Cuperus, J., Jansonius, K., Verhoeven, L., (2010) *Pragmatic language impairment and associated behavioural problems* International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders 45(2): 204-14

# Differences with SLCN

## Every child with SLCN is different

The diagram below has a bewildering number of arrows in order to represent a complex picture. Different diagnoses can result in a similar profile of difficulties, or indeed children without diagnoses can have a variety of SLCN.

It is important to remember that every child and young person is different, so children with the same diagnosis can have different strengths and areas of need. This diagram and the case examples in Section 2 show that knowing the diagnosis does not necessarily lead to an understanding of the SLCN a child may have.

A diagnosis does not necessarily give a clear indication of the support a child or young person will need so a flexible approach to supporting children with SLCN is necessary.

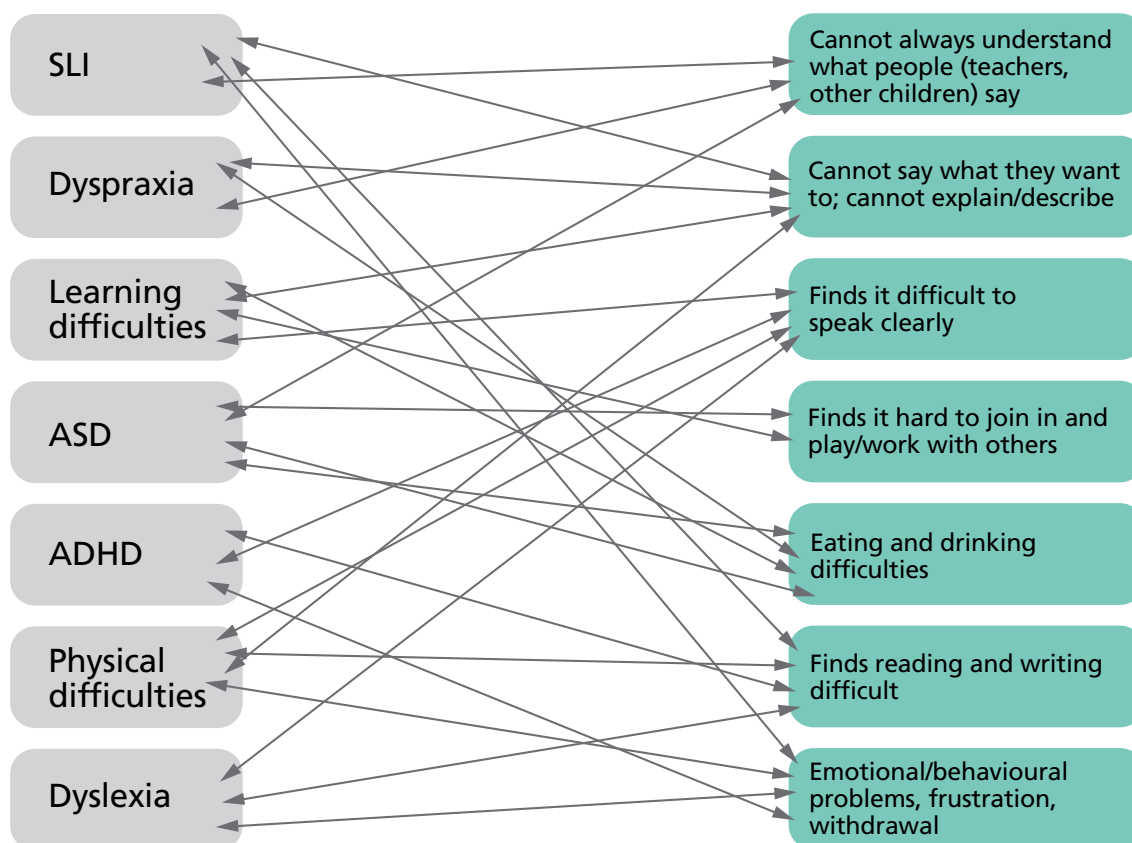


Figure 3. A complex issue

Diagnosis does not reliably predict the type of SLCN a child may experience.

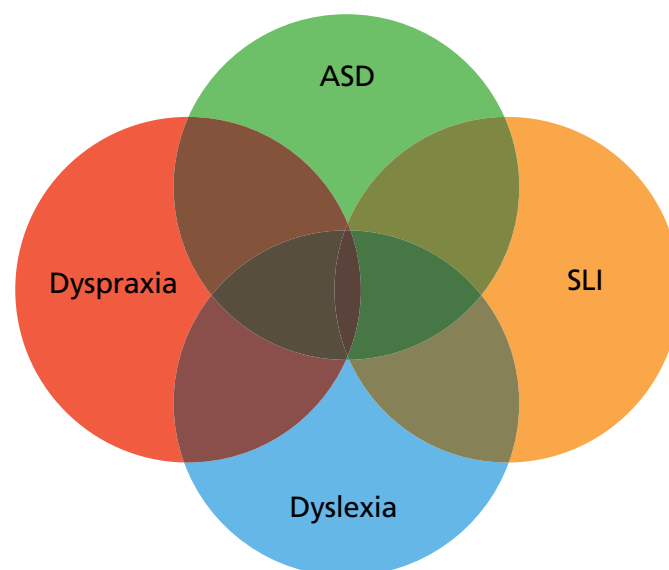
# More than one label

## Children with SLCN often have more than one difficulty/diagnosis

Parents often spend a great deal of energy trying to find the right diagnosis for their child in an effort to understand their needs or for others to understand what the needs of the child are. There is sometimes frustration when this diagnosis or label doesn't quite fit, or when another seems more appropriate as the child grows older.

Children having more than one developmental difficulty (co-morbidity) is the rule rather than the exception, especially where these difficulties are severe. In school, this may be relevant where a statement of SEN is required. Co-morbidity can also cause difficulties within the SEN procedure as practitioners have to decide what a child's primary difficulty is, leading to variation in the way children are categorised.

The diagram below gives some indication of what this could mean, although the precise amount of overlap is not known. We do know that children who have SLCN are more likely to have dyspraxia<sup>10</sup>. There are also overlaps between dyslexia and SLI<sup>11</sup>, and dyslexia and speech sound disorders in children<sup>12</sup>. SLI and ADHD<sup>13</sup> often seem to occur together and SLI and ASD may be less distinct than we thought<sup>14</sup> as some children show the characteristics of both. There is great value to describing the needs a child has rather than the label attached to them.



10 Law et al (2000) *Provision for children's speech and language needs in England and Wales: facilitating communication between education and health services* DfES research report 239

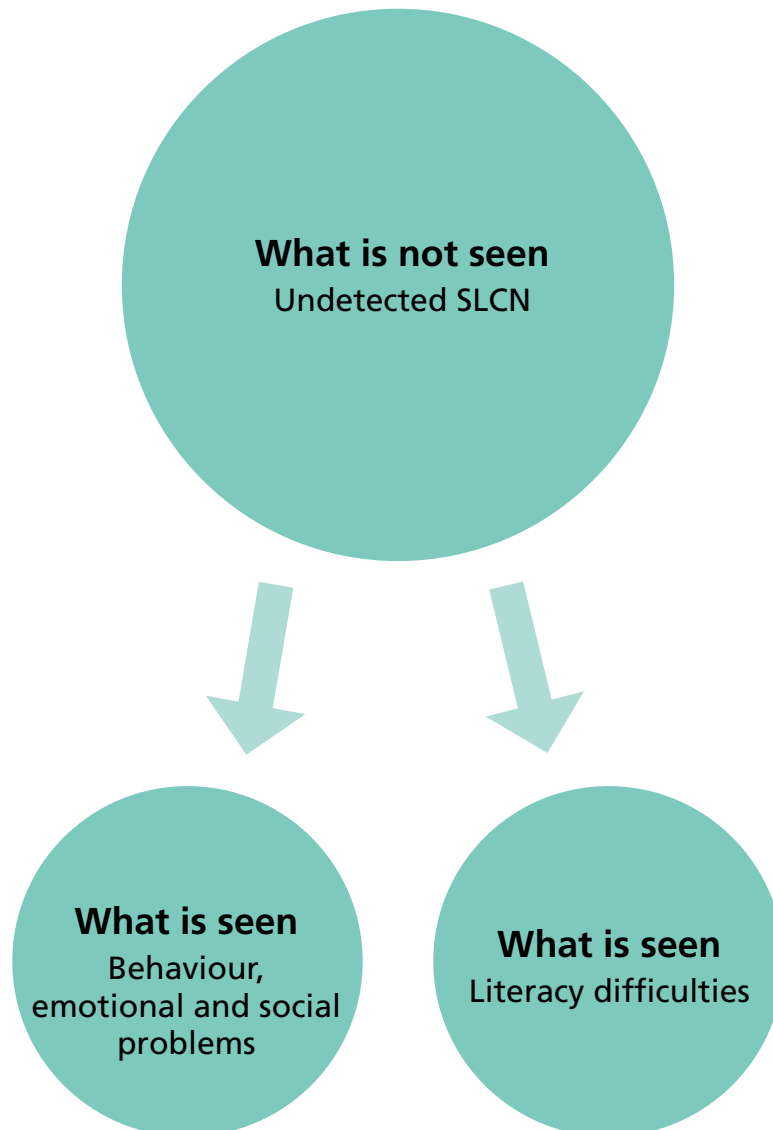
11 Catts, H. W., Adlof, S. M., Hogan, T. P., Weismer, S. E., (2005) *Are Specific Language Impairment and Dyslexia Distinct Disorders?* Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, Vol 48(6), pp. 1378-1396.

12 Pennington, B.F., Bishop, D.V. M., (2009) *Relations among speech, language, and reading disorders* Annual Review of Psychology, 60/(283-306)

13 McGrath, L. M., Hutaff-Lee, C., Scott, A., Boada, R., Shriberg, L. D., Pennington, B. F., (2008) *Children with Comorbid Speech Sound Disorder and Specific Language Impairment are at Increased Risk for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder*, Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, vol./is. 36/2(151-63),

14 Tager-Flushberg, H., (2006) *Defining language phenotypes in autism* Clinical neuroscience Research 6 (3-4) 219-224

# SLCN may not always be identified



## SLCN may not be as obvious as the effects

Children and young people who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties or literacy difficulties may have SLCN that nobody has identified.

## SLCN changes over time

This diagram shows the possible effects for a child with SLCN at different stages in their life.

0-2

- Takes longer to start to talk
- Fewer words

3-5

11-14

- Literacy problems
- Behavioural issues

15-16



6-11

- Difficult to understand
- Behavioural issues

- Reading and writing difficulties
- Difficulty making friends

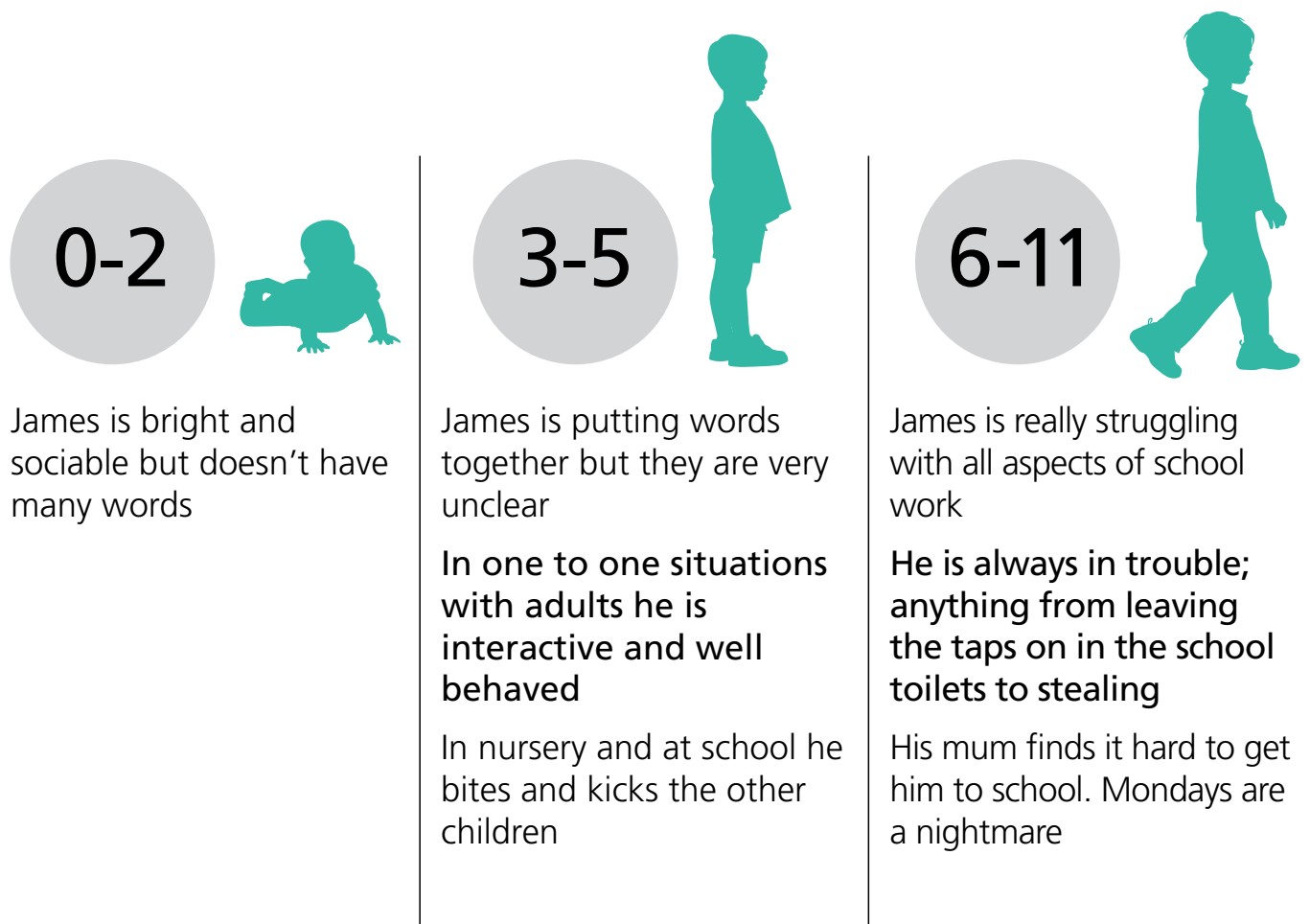
Leaving school

- Difficulty interacting with peers
- Increased vulnerability
- Mental health issues

- Fewer GCSEs than peers
- Limited job prospects

## SLCN changes over time

This diagram shows a possible example of a child who has SLCN who has not been identified and did not receive support at crucial stages in his life.



11-14



James avoids school; he stays in his local area

**His speech is clear but he has limited vocabulary and poor language. He struggles to read or write**

He messes about in class until they send him out - he is known at school as 'difficult'

14-16



James had a night in a police cell - he wasn't really sure why him and not the other people he was with

**In school, no-one messes with him, but he has no friends**

Teachers say he's not trying - he finds everything very hard

Leaving school



James knows he won't get a job

**He loves motorbikes but apprenticeships go to the smarter kids**

He spends most of his days sleeping and his nights out in his area

## Section 2: Introducing some children with speech, language and communication needs



All of the following children and young people have SLCN. The impact is different for each of them. Consider what diagnosis they each might have, and compare with the information on page 30.

# George

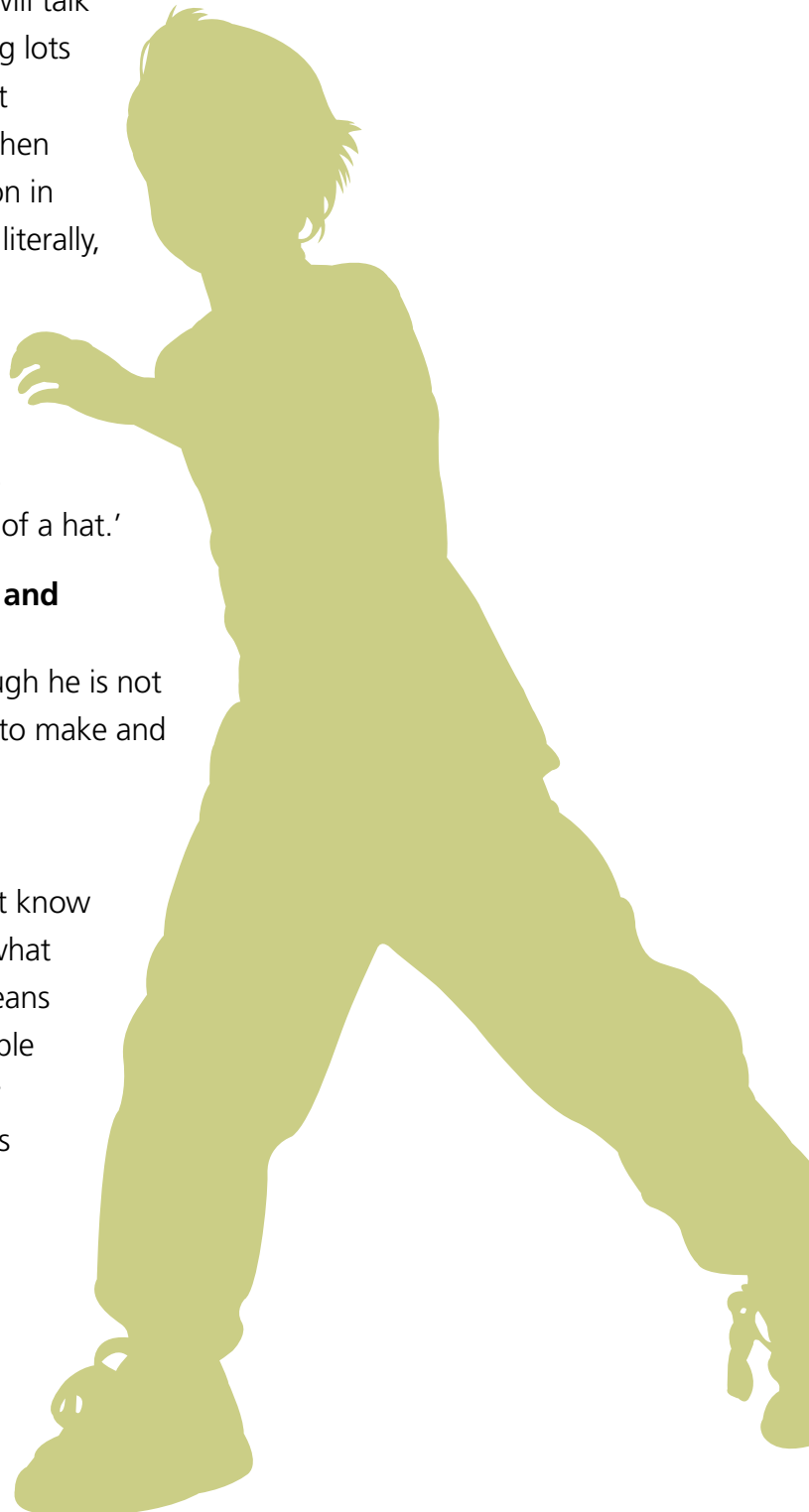
George is 11 years old, is high-achieving at school and particularly good at maths. He can be extremely talkative, though it can be difficult to follow his conversations, as he assumes the listener already knows what he is talking about. He often does not stick to the topic of conversation or will talk a lot about what he is interested in, giving lots of very minute detail. He does not look at people when he is talking or listening. When he is speaking there is very little expression in his voice. George often takes things very literally, when his teacher asked George, 'can you shut the door please?' he responded 'Yes' as he did not understand his teacher wanted him to actually shut the door. He does not understand idioms such as 'as high as a kite' or 'at the drop of a hat.'

## **The effect of these speech, language and communication needs**

George is happy to talk with others, though he is not always successful and he really struggles to make and keep friends.

## **What helps George**

When people say things like 'Sorry I don't know who you mean' and when they explain what idioms mean, for example 'get a grip' means 'calm down'. It also helps him when people explain what facial expressions mean, for example when his teacher says 'Ben looks bored, did you talk too much?'



# Karim

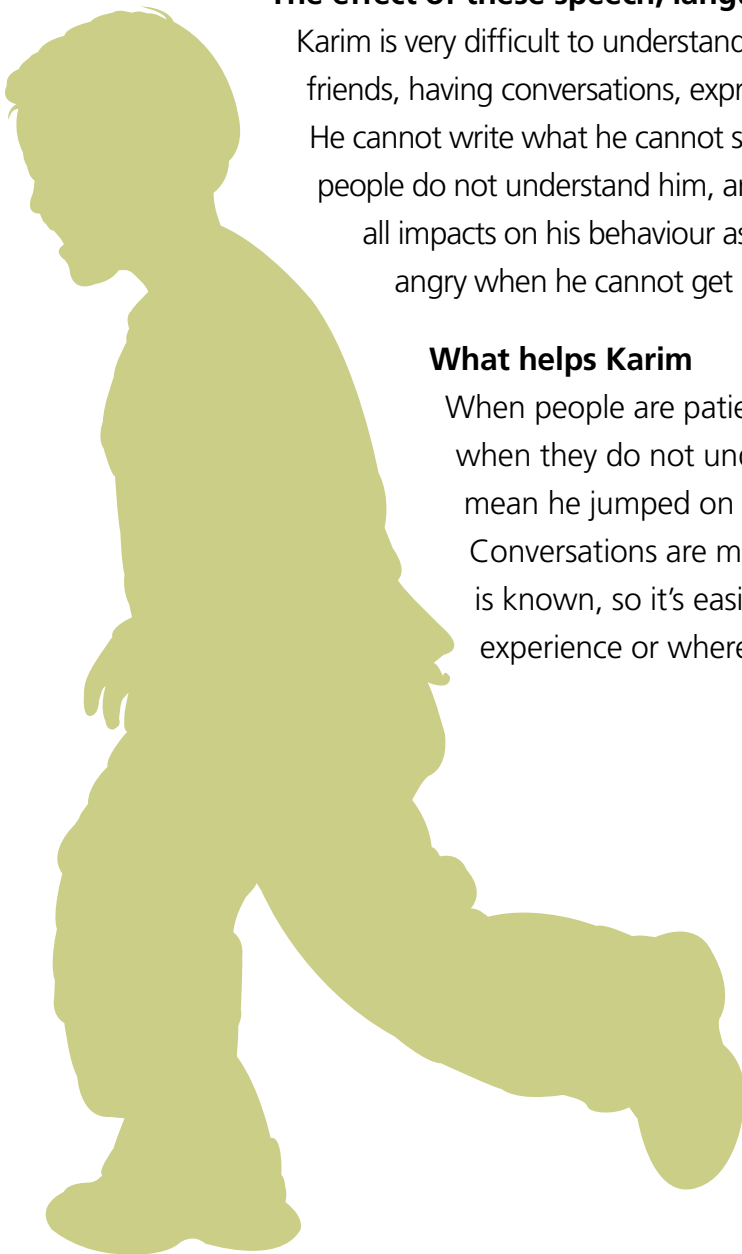
Karim is 7 years old. His understanding of words and sentences is above average for his age and he can easily follow conversations. He can talk in short sentences, but has difficulty organising sentences of more than 4 or 5 words; if he tries his sentences get very muddled. He does not know how to use word endings such as 'ed' in jumped, or pronouns, such as 'he', 'she', 'they', etc. The way his language is developing is not like other children - it is not just immature, it is different (atypical). His speech is also unclear and is quite monotonous.

## **The effect of these speech, language and communication needs**

Karim is very difficult to understand, he has difficulty making and keeping friends, having conversations, expressing his needs, wants, and opinions. He cannot write what he cannot say, so writing is a problem when people do not understand him, and he struggles with reading. This all impacts on his behaviour as Karim becomes very frustrated and angry when he cannot get his message across.

## **What helps Karim**

When people are patient and when they give him choices when they do not understand. For example 'Did you mean he jumped on the dog or he thumped the dog?' Conversations are more successful when the context is known, so it's easier for him to talk about a shared experience or where he can refer to a picture or object.



# Lucy

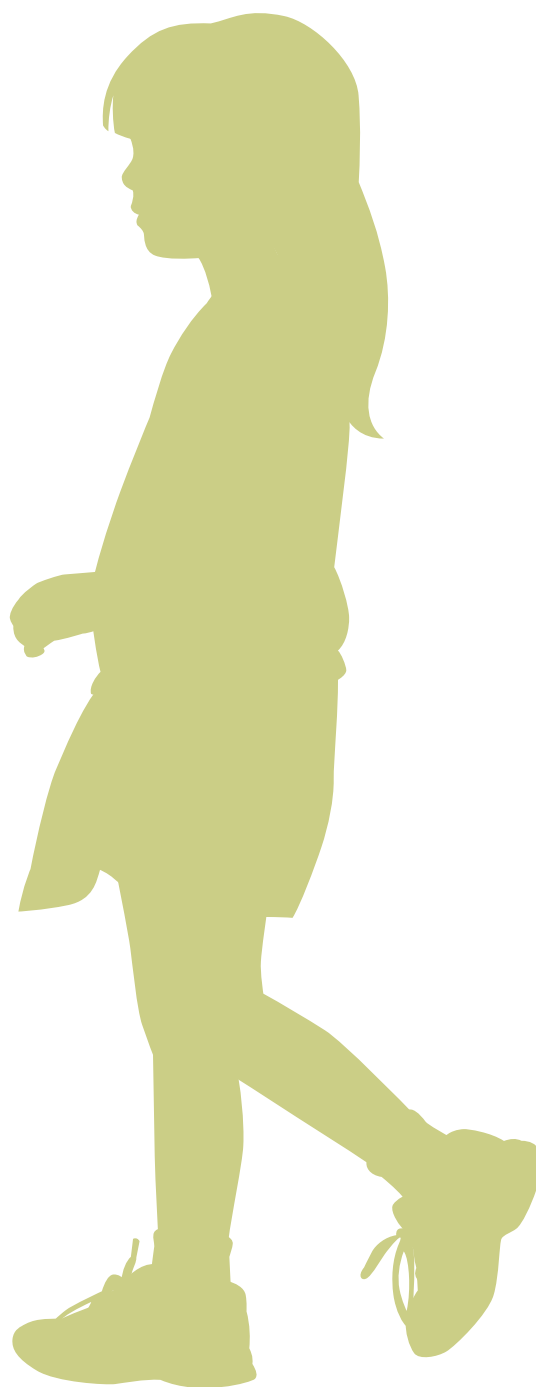
Lucy is 8 years old, quiet and well behaved. She is in a mainstream class but has severe difficulties understanding language. She can only understand basic instructions; just two key pieces of information at once and she does not understand negatives, so 'don't go outside yet' seems to mean 'go outside' to her.

## **The effect of these speech, language and communication needs**

Although Lucy made good progress when she started school, her progress slowed down and her mother and teachers became anxious. Everyone feels that she is doing her best, but Lucy is becoming increasingly disheartened. The language of the classroom is at too high a level for her as she cannot remember longer instructions. At home Lucy often goes upstairs to get something and either brings some of the things down or the wrong things or forgets.

## **What helps Lucy**

After a speech and language therapy assessment, her mother was relieved; she now knows what help Lucy needs. The speech and language therapist provided a report for the school and Lucy is given targeted support. Everyone can help Lucy by using just short simple sentences.



# Jack

Jack is 9 years old and has difficulties understanding what is said to him. He can understand simple sentences if they relate to what he is doing, to family or school routines and activities. He can understand questions using words like 'what?', 'where?', and 'who?' but not those asking 'why?' or 'when'. He communicates using short phrases to get his message across – maybe 3 or 4 words together. His speech is unclear; he speaks very quietly and does not look at the person he is speaking to - so it is difficult to follow for those people who do not know him well. Jack also has a stammer, which is worse some days than others and this too can affect how easy it is for people to understand him.

## **The effect of these speech, language and communication needs**

Jack can be extremely quiet, especially in groups or with unfamiliar adults, and then his talking can become little more than a whisper. His difficulties with intelligibility mean he often asks adults around him to explain or talk for him. With familiar adults and good friends, he is chatty and appears more confident and outgoing.

## **What helps Jack**

When he understands what is happening, by being given visual clues, signs or gestures to help him understand. When other children are encouraged to ask him for his ideas and when he is listened to carefully.





Isha is 10 years old. In a conversation with another person she is able to talk easily about school and home life. She has good social skills. When there is a lot of complex language, such as new technical vocabulary in class, she occasionally misses the point and therefore misinterprets what is being said or asked. When this happens, she needs time to work things out and to organise her own language to respond. Isha has a good vocabulary, though sometimes cannot find the word she is looking for when she is talking, even though she knows the word and what it means.

### **The effect of these speech, language and communication needs**

At times, Isha has difficulty keeping up with friends when they are all chatting. She also struggles to understand the nature of her difficulties and finds it difficult to see her strengths, so it is affecting both her self esteem and friendships. She finds herself opting out of social events and situations.

### **What helps Isha**

When teachers explain new words, when she is given extra time to contribute, when she has one to one conversations and when she is encouraged to see her strengths and use them to support her areas of difficulty.



# Naomi

Naomi is 16 years old. She was taken into foster care at two years old and has had six placement breakdowns since then. She has difficulty understanding complex language and although she can read words to an extent, she cannot always understand what she has read. She can talk about events in a clear order, but only by using simple sentences, otherwise it gets muddled. In conversation she tends to interrupt and finds it difficult to stay on topic. She finds it very difficult to remember what she has heard.

## **The effect of these speech, language and communication needs**

Naomi finds it very difficult to follow lessons and gets annoyed when she cannot remember what she is supposed to be doing. Other pupils get frustrated with her constant interruptions. She was excluded from mainstream school. She has few friends and she tends to spend her time alone on the computer although that also frustrates her because she cannot read instructions. She likes maths and is quite good at mental arithmetic but she often distracts herself by talking about something irrelevant.

## **What helps Naomi**

When she is cued in to listen and when instructions are short and accompanied by visual cues. Speaking and writing frames also help her.



# Jermaine

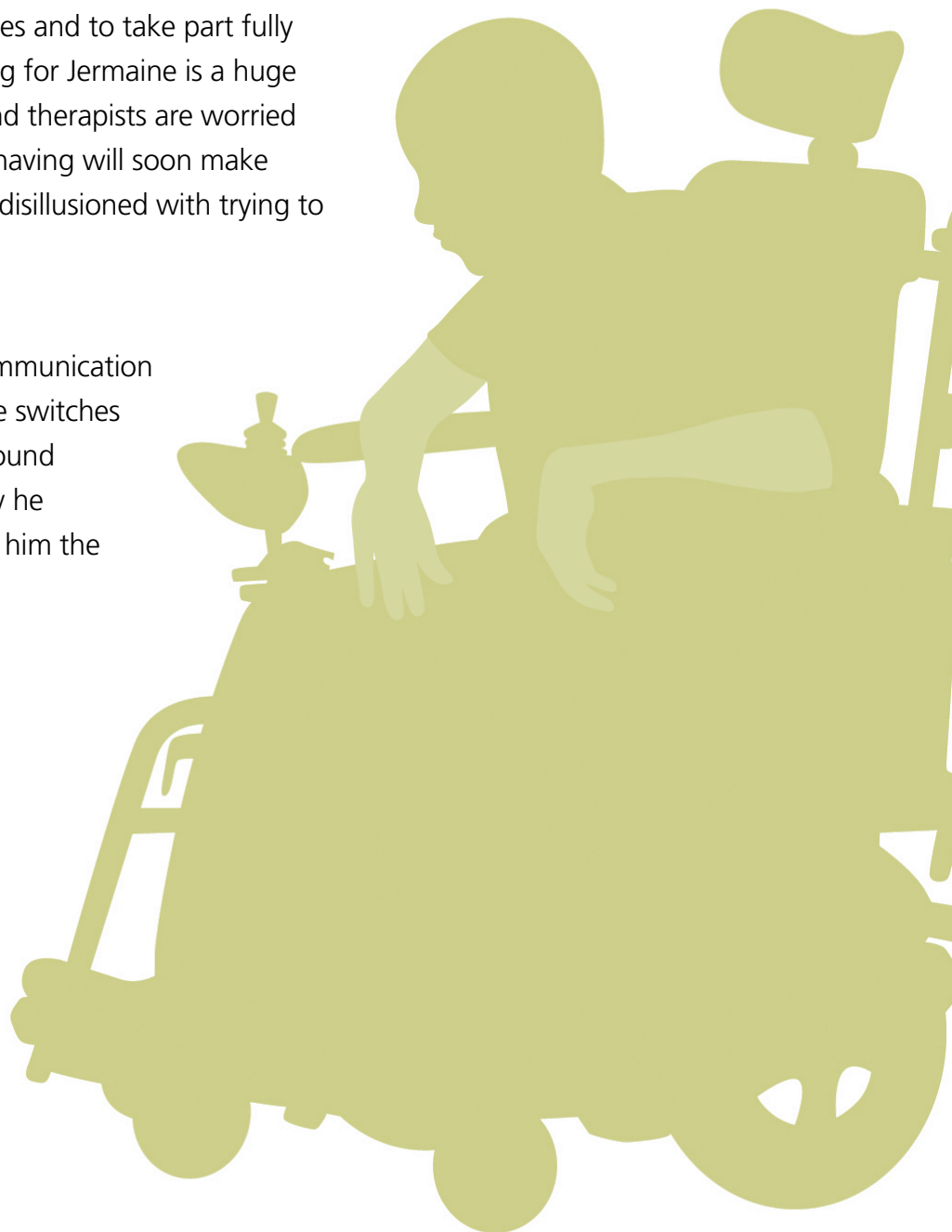
Jermaine is unable to speak verbally and has physical difficulties affecting all his limbs. He uses an electronic communication aid.

## **The effect of these speech, language and communication needs**

Jermaine struggles to communicate with other people, especially those who do not know him very well. His physical difficulties also make it difficult to access the communication aid he was given. He needs this aid to help him communicate and join in conversations, to indicate his choices and preferences and to take part fully in classes. Communicating for Jermaine is a huge effort and his teachers and therapists are worried that the difficulties he is having will soon make him tired, frustrated and disillusioned with trying to communicate.

## **What helps Jermaine**

A modified electronic communication aid so that he can use the switches effectively and people around him that understand how he communicates and allow him the time to do so.



# Ben

Ben is 12 and he is in the lowest set for every subject. He cannot read well, he does not contribute in class and he sometimes gets into trouble for not listening. He does not understand much of the vocabulary teachers use. He would like to learn 'posh words' because he knows they are important for getting a job, but he is too embarrassed to ask anyone what they mean.

Ben knows other pupils are learning how to do presentations and thinking about how interviewers get the best answers out of interviewees. He wants to know how to do this, but his class just mess about in those lessons. He gets on with his friends but did not know what to say when the head teacher wanted to chat, so he ran off.

No one knows it, but Ben does have SLCN; his ability to understand language, his vocabulary and his ability to use language in different ways in different contexts are all very limited in comparison to other children of his age who live in more affluent areas.

## **What helps Ben**

Specific teaching about vocabulary in each subject, simpler instructions in class, more guidance for discussion in lessons and opportunities to practice. Also, building his confidence and teaching of strategies to use when he doesn't understand.



# Mollie

Mollie was initially described as language delayed, although she also had difficulty with fine motor skills; jigsaws and cutting were very difficult. By the time she started primary school she had problems with speech, writing, dressing and cutting and she was diagnosed with developmental co-ordination disorder, or dyspraxia.

As her language began to develop she was still difficult to understand, because she missed off word endings such as plurals and past tenses. She also had difficulty pronouncing words with three syllables or more.

Her peers soon overtook her in school as she had literacy difficulties and found joining in with discussions hard. She was moved to a language unit when she was eight as her language was developing slowly and in an unusual way, indicative of SLI.

Her interaction difficulties became more obvious as she got older, she became increasingly socially isolated and her interests narrowed in comparison to her peers. By the time she moved to secondary school an additional diagnosis of ASD seemed appropriate.

## **What helps Mollie**

Mollie still needs time to help her process language and think about what she wants to say. She will need additional support to understand and use language to learn. She also needs guidance from adults how to talk and interact with other pupils at school.



# Diagnoses



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**George** has Asperger syndrome, a form of autism which affects how a person makes sense of the world

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**Karim** has a specific language impairment, this affects 7% of all children

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**Lucy** has a difficulty that needs to be supported if progress is to be made

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**Jack** has Down's Syndrome with associated learning difficulties

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**Isha** has dyslexia, a learning difficulty that affects her accuracy with reading and spelling

---

**Naomi** has ADHD, this affects 8% of all children and 50% of these have some form of SLCN

---

**Jermaine** has cerebral palsy, this greatly affects the way he communicates but he still wants to share his views and thoughts

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**Ben** has SLCN and no other difficulty

---

**Mollie** shows that knowing the medical or educational label only provides clues to the nature of their SLCN

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So knowing the medical or educational label a child with SLCN has will only provide limited clues to the nature of their SLCN and many children will not have a clear diagnosis despite an obvious need. In order to meet the needs of children with SLCN it is more important to know their profile of strengths and needs, and the impact of these on how they are able to learn and socialise. By knowing this it is possible to plan how to address these by teaching skills and using specific teaching strategies.

## Or no diagnosis

Many children with SLCN, including those who have difficulties like the ones described above, do not have a diagnosis, SEN categorisation or label.

The most likely consequences for SLCN are literacy difficulties, which has clear implications for education. SLCN also has a huge impact on interactions and so children and young people miss opportunities to develop their language skills further.

There is a strong association between SLCN, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) and later mental health issues. It is often the impact of the SLCN that is seen – poor literacy, behaviour problems, withdrawal from activities – rather than the underlying needs, which can remain ‘hidden’.

It is also true to say that not all of the negative consequences of SLCN will apply to every child or young person.

Reading *Don't Get Me Wrong* may support development of the following competences of the speech, language and communication framework (SLCF):

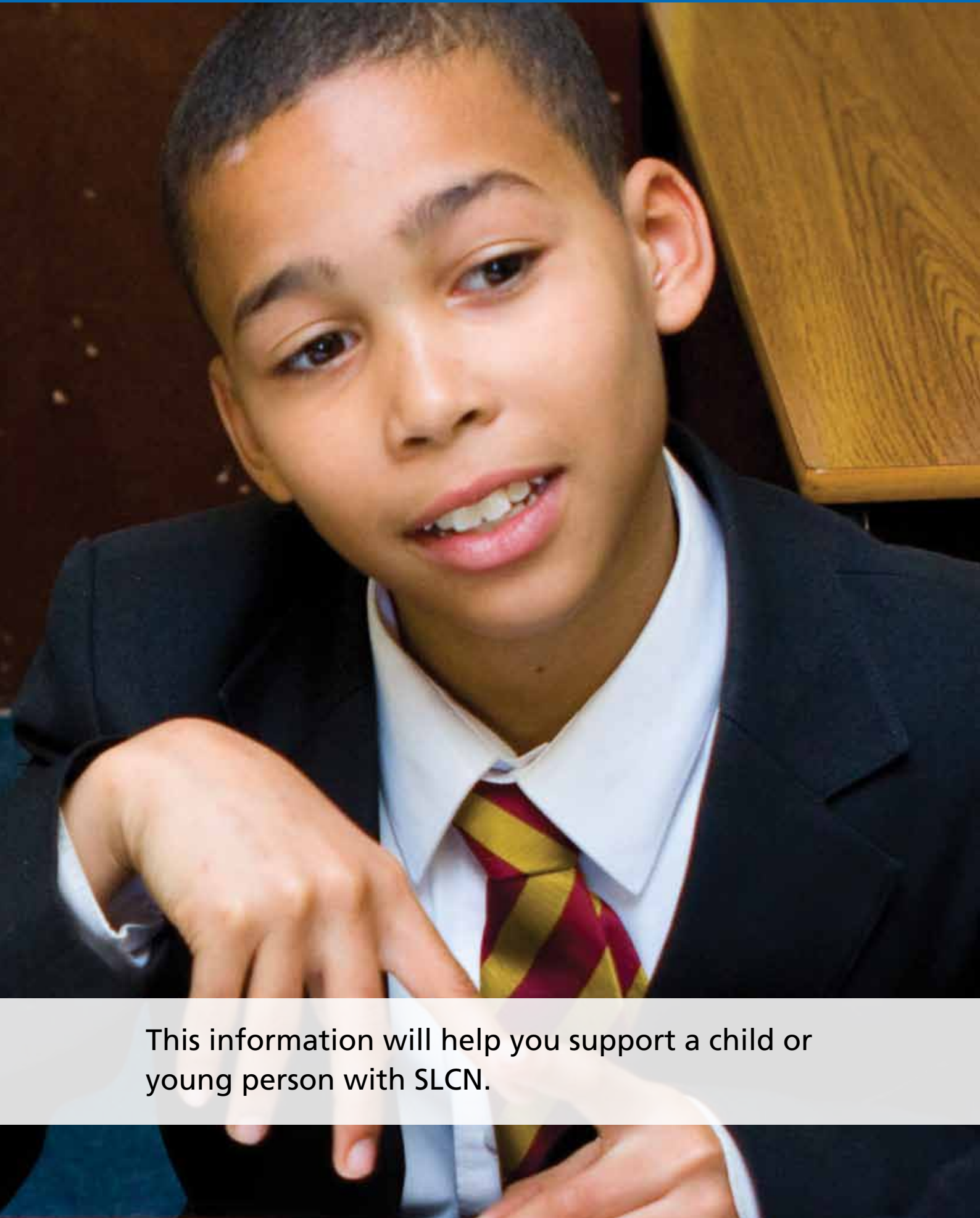
Section 1: Universal B2; Universal B7

Enhanced B1, B2 and B3. These are reinforced in Section 2

Section 3: Enhanced C2; C3; C13

Enhanced G4

## Section 3: Supporting someone with speech, language and communication needs



This information will help you support a child or young person with SLCN.



# General ways to help improve communication for all children

**You can seek advice from your local speech and language therapy team for support with children who have SLCN.**

**Go to [www.talkingpoint.org.uk/talkinglinks](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk/talkinglinks) to find your local service.**

**The following suggestions are good practice not only for children and young people with SLCN but for all children.**

## **If they have difficulty understanding language**

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

## **Check their understanding**

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- Support children to recognise when they do not understand
- Ask the young person to repeat back in their own words what you have said, then you will know how much they have understood

## **Help them focus on what is important**

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- Make sure you are facing the child or young person when giving information
- Use their name at the start of instructions if they are not focussed
- Use phrases like 'everyone needs to listen to this', however this instruction may be difficult for someone who has autism, for example
- Give an overview first
- Give pointers for what they should listen to such as, 'It's important you remember X from what I am going to tell you'
- Summarise where necessary before you go into detail
- Emphasise key words

## **Give extra thinking time**

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- Allow extra time for them to listen and process language

### **Simplify your language**

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

### **Teach them strategies**

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

### **Provide other cues**

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

### **Help them make links**

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

# Specific advice to support children who have SLCN

## If they have difficulty expressing themselves

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

## If someone stammers

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

## If communication is a problem

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- Explain the effect on the listener when social communication rules are broken and perhaps explore through role play
- Praise good listening skills
- Encourage them to wait for a gap, or a clear signal from the speaker before joining in
- Encourage children to look at the non verbal cues which help us understand what the other person thinks and feels, for example when a person pauses, that means you can have a turn

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

### **If they do not have enough language**

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

## Getting more help and information



## General information

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[www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk) has lots of information about speech, language and communication development, SLCN and ways to support children and young people.

[www.talkingpoint.org.uk/talkinglinks](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk/talkinglinks) is a database of services which support children and young people with SLCN, searchable by postcode. This includes the contact details of local speech and language therapy services.

The Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF) outlines what people who work with children and young people need to know and be able to do in order to support children's communication. By completing the SLCF you will find areas you are strong in and areas which need further attention. It will then highlight courses that could be useful for you. For more information about the SLCF go to [www.talkingpoint.org.uk/slcf](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk/slcf)

A speech, language and communication unit has been included as a mandatory part of the new Level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young People's Workforce. The Communication Trust has developed free, expertly written materials for trainers and learners to support the delivery of the unit. These materials will include video footage, activities and handbooks. Contact [enquiries@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk) for more information or to order the training materials.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists is the professional body for speech and language therapists in the UK. Go to [www.rcslt.org.uk](http://www.rcslt.org.uk) for more information.

## Resources

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Speaking, Listening, Learning: Working with children in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, National Strategies, <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/84856>

Literacy across the Curriculum (2002) The Department for Education [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/secondary/keystage3/all/respub/lit\\_xc](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/secondary/keystage3/all/respub/lit_xc)

Pedagogy and practice: Teaching and learning in secondary schools – Unit 7: Questioning (2004) Department for Education <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/174691>

Assessment for Learning materials; AfL Unit 7: Questioning and dialogue (whole school and subject materials) (2004) The Department for Education <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/155491>

Teaching for progression: speaking and listening (2008) The Department for Education [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/speakingandlistening](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/speakingandlistening)

Assessing Pupils progress in speaking and listening (2010) The Department for Education [https://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/303361?uc=force\\_uj](https://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/303361?uc=force_uj)

Teaching Speaking and Listening: e-learning modules for secondary teachers [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/ad27/speaking](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/nationalstrategies/ad27/speaking)

I CAN Talk programmes [www.ican.org.uk/the%20talk%20programme.aspx](http://www.ican.org.uk/the%20talk%20programme.aspx)

Including young people with speech and language impairments in secondary school (2009) Afasic Scotland. [www.afasicscotland.org.uk/pubs.htm](http://www.afasicscotland.org.uk/pubs.htm)

BT free education resources, [www.bt.com/learningskillsresources](http://www.bt.com/learningskillsresources)

Autism Education Trust website, resources to help schools support children with autism, [www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/Resources.aspx](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/Resources.aspx)

Ripley, K., Barrett, J., (2008) **Supporting Speech, Language & Communication Needs: Working with Students Aged 11 to 19** Sage Publishing

Hayden, S., Jordan, E., (2007) **A Practical Guide for Supporting Pupils with Language and Communication Difficulties across the Curriculum**, David Fulton Publishers

Rinaldi, W., Social Use of Language Programme [www.wendyrinaldi.com/wr-sulp-u.htm](http://www.wendyrinaldi.com/wr-sulp-u.htm)

Kelly, A., **Talk About Activities Developing Social Communication Skills** Speech mark Publishing

Elklan training [www.elklan.co.uk](http://www.elklan.co.uk)

Inclusion Development Programme (IDP): Dyslexia and speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/165381>

Hayden, S., Jordan, E., Language for Learning training materials [www.languageforlearning.co.uk](http://www.languageforlearning.co.uk)

ELCISS project; resources to be published by Speechmark [www.elciss.com](http://www.elciss.com)

Speech, Language and Communication Information for Primary and Secondary Schools booklets downloadable via [www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk). The booklets include information on resources available to support speech, language and communication.

Further information and support can be accessed through The Communication Trust's consortium members, go to [www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/partners](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/partners) for more information.

## Checklists for identifying SLCN

Inclusion Development Programme  
[www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/features/inclusion/sen/idp](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/features/inclusion/sen/idp)  
[http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/327855?uc=force\\_uj](http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/327855?uc=force_uj)

Ripley, K., Barrett, J., (2008)  
**Supporting Speech, Language & Communication Needs: Working with Students Aged 11 to 19** Sage Publishing

Afasic checklists (age 4-10)  
[www.afasicengland.org.uk/publications/resources-for-professionals/](http://www.afasicengland.org.uk/publications/resources-for-professionals/)

Dewart and Summers (1995)  
**Pragmatics Profile of Communication Skills in Children**

I CAN checklist (see Appendix 1)

These websites and resources were current at the time this publication was printed.

This list of resources and checklists is not an exhaustive list. Please visit [www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk) for further information or subscribe to our newsletter to receive our regular updates. Email 'subscribe' to [enquiries@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk)

**Don't Get Me Wrong** has been produced in partnership by The Communication Trust, The Dyslexia SpLD Trust and the Autism Education Trust



## **The Communication Trust**

The Communication Trust consists of over 35 voluntary sector organisations that bring together their expertise to ensure that the speech, language and communication needs of all children and young people are met through signposting specialist training support and guidance to people working with children.

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

### **Members of The Communication Trust consortium:**

1 Voice, ACE Centre North, ACE Centre, Action for Children, Afasic, Association for the Rehabilitation of Communication and Oral Skills (ARCOS), Auditory Verbal UK, Barnardo's, British Stammering Association, Candle, CENMAC, Chailey Heritage Clinical Services, Communication Matters, Contact a Family, DialogueLab, Elklan, I CAN, KIDS, Language for Learning, The Makaton Charity, Mencap, MERU, National Association of Professionals concerned with Language Impairment in Children (NAPLIC), National Autistic Society (NAS), National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS), National Literacy Trust, Paget Gorman Society, Radio in Schools, St Catherine's, Scope, Selective Mutism Information and Research Association (SMIRA), Social Emotional Behavioural Difficulties Association (SEBDA), Symbol UK, The Children's Society, The Children's Trust Tadworth, The Learning Partnership.

com, The Michael Palin Centre for Stammering Children, The Signalong Group, TreeHouse

For further information on the work of The Communication Trust and contact details for Consortium members visit the Trust's website

[www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk) or call 020 7843 2550.

## **The Dyslexia-SpLD**

The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust is a consortium of organisations involved in promoting improved practice and outcomes for individuals with dyslexia and specific learning difficulties. The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust was established to provide information on effective provision for educating and supporting individuals with dyslexia and specific learning difficulties.

### **Members of The Dyslexia SpLD Trust consortium:**

British Dyslexia Association, Dyslexia Action, Helen Arkell Centre, The Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (PATOSS), Springboard for Children, Xtraordinary People.

For further information and advice on supporting young people with dyslexia, contact the British Dyslexia Association helpline on 0845 251 9002 or visit [www.thedyslexia-spldtrust.org.uk](http://www.thedyslexia-spldtrust.org.uk)

## **The Autism Education Trust**

The Autism Education Trust works to raise awareness of autism across the children's workforce. They bring together organisations involved in delivering autism education services, to share good practice and information and to involve children and young people with autism and their carers to enhance and improve autism education in England.

### **Members of the Autism Education Trust steering group include:**

Autism Alliance, Wessex Autistic Society, National Autistic Society, TreeHouse, Council for Disabled Children, Blackpool Local Authority, West Midlands Regional Hub, South Gloucestershire Local Authority, Autism Centre for Education and Research at University of Birmingham.

For further information on Autism Spectrum Disorders, contact the National Autistic Society Autism helpline on 0845 070 4004 or visit [www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk)

This publication was written by Melanie Cross, Professional Advisor, I CAN and Mary Hartshorne, Head of Quality and Outcomes, I CAN

Thank you to those who made additional contributions to this publication.



# Appendix 1: Indicators list for identifying communication difficulties

Young person's name \_\_\_\_\_ Year group \_\_\_\_\_

Completed by \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Understanding language: Spoken rather than written language. The pupil:	Tick if applicable
<b>Has difficulties following long or complex instructions</b> "You need to read the chapter and then identify the key ideas which you then need to write about, explaining why they are important."	
<b>Has better understanding in a 1:1 situation than in a group</b> Knows and understands what you say to him in 1:1 yet in a whole class or group situation is confused	
<b>Watches and copies others when instructions are given</b>	
<b>Has difficulties recalling information or putting it into the right sequence</b> Unable to remember and recount last week's episode of a 'soap' on T.V.	
<b>Tends to take things literally</b> When told "I'll be back in a minute" literally expects the person to come back to them in 60 seconds	
<b>Gives an inappropriate response to abstract language</b> 'Keep your hair on' results in them looking confused, or asking about their hair	
<b>Repeats what you say rather than responding appropriately</b> "What have you been reading?" – "I've been reading"	
<b>Has difficulties understanding implied meaning</b> 'I wouldn't take my shoes off now' meaning 'Don't take your shoes off'. Interpreted as you talking about yourself	
Is slow to learn new routines Finds it difficult to learn new ideas and language especially in sequence	
<b>FORM:</b> Structure of their communication e.g. word/picture/sign and syntax <b>The pupil:</b>	
<b>Speaks too quickly</b> So that others cannot follow what has been said	
<b>Is not easy to understand</b> When talking about spies says pies, when talking about yesterday uses 'today I played football'	
<b>Says the same word differently at different times</b> Hospital: hotpital, hosital	
<b>Stammers</b> hesitates, repeats sounds/words, gets stuck	
<b>Has difficulties with prepositions and tenses</b> on, under, over, behind, etc. or tenses ran, running, will run	

<b>Has difficulties using sentences with conjunctions</b> including 'and', 'because' 'so', or uses these words too much	
<b>May take a long time to organise words into a sentence</b> Pauses for a long time before responding or stops mid sentence, searching for a word	
<b>Misses out words or puts them in the wrong order</b> "Last night football played park" for 'last night I played football in the park'	
<b>Has difficulties giving specific answers or explanations</b> "I dunno, its kind of, something that's, well you know..."	
<b>Has difficulties recalling and sequencing events and ideas appropriately</b> Finds it difficult remember or tell a story, even a simple one	
<b>CONTENT: Meaning of their message – semantics The pupil:</b>	
<b>Has limited vocabulary</b> Uses same core vocabulary which could lead to excessive swearing	
<b>Finds it hard to express emotions verbally</b> Can't explain how they are feeling or why	
<b>Uses fluent clear speech which doesn't seem to mean much</b> Came over to that place and did that you know	
<b>Has trouble learning new words</b> Names of people and objects	
<b>Cannot provide significant information to listeners</b> Difficult for the listener to understand what their message is	
<b>Uses made up words which are almost appropriate</b> 'Window worker man'	
<b>Overuses 'meaningless' words</b> Thingy, whatever, and that	
<b>USE: Purpose, function or reason for communication including pragmatics and social communication. The pupil:</b>	
<b>Has difficulties with eye contact or personal space</b> Doesn't make eye contact or gets too close to others	
<b>Interrupts inappropriately</b> Not aware of when it is and isn't appropriate to say something	
<b>Avoids situations which require words</b> Social situations, reading out loud or presenting to others	
<b>Is unable to vary language with the situation</b> Uses the same language with peers, teachers and unfamiliar adults	
<b>Attracts attention in inappropriate ways or without words</b> Annoys others, fiddles with things, or sits quietly and does their own thing	
<b>In conversation, moves from topic to topic for no obvious reason or finds it difficult to change the subject</b> "Do I need to type this up, so can I go and talk to Sam, I like your earrings"	
<b>Has difficulties taking turns in conversation</b> Always monopolises the conversation or doesn't understand when someone has a different view and changes the focus	

<b>Doesn't ask questions or start a conversation</b> Sits quietly and waits for others to initiate verbal communication	
<b>Doesn't say if they can't understand</b> Will continue doing what they are doing even if it isn't what was asked for	

Would you want to refer for further more detailed assessment? YES\_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

Additional comments:

Signature:



*Hello* is the national year of communication – a campaign to increase understanding of how important it is to develop good communication skills. The campaign is run by The Communication Trust, a coalition of over 35 leading voluntary sector organisations, in partnership with Jean Gross, the Government’s Communication Champion.

*Hello* aims to make 2011 the year when communication for all children and young people becomes a priority in homes and schools across the UK. The campaign is backed by the Department for Education and sponsored by BT and Pearson Assessment.

*Hello* will provide information and guidance on typical communication development, how to spot if children are struggling and where to go for help and support.

Our aim is to use the national year to deliver tangible improvements for children, young people and families affected by speech, language and communication needs. This will include more support for parents and carers, earlier identification of difficulties as well as earlier and more appropriate referral to specialist support.

Visit [www.hello.org.uk](http://www.hello.org.uk) to sign up for regular updates and find out how you can get involved in *Hello*.



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