TOP TIPS FOR SUPPORTING PUPILS WITH SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS

This document was created by the DSPL Outreach Team in collaboration with the SLCN Working Group

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Introduction

At DSPL9, we believe that Speech, Language and Communication (SLCN) are fundamental for children's learning and development. During these unprecedented times we anticipate that there will be a significant increase in pupils with SLCN returning to our schools. Possible factors for this increase may be:

The reduction in involvement from The Speech and Language Therapy Service

- Home environment
- Lack of social communication opportunities
- Trauma
- Increased use of electronical devices.

We predict that the increase in the number of children displaying SLCN, will result in school's seeking the involvements of the Speech and Language Therapy Service; however, it is anticipated that when schools do fully open this service will be unable to provide their usual package of care for some time. If we think back pre COVID-19 there were already significant delays in children being seen by a Speech and Language Therapist, and the current crisis is only going to make this delay greater. Consequently, it is imperative that we as educational professionals are able to provide the best possible support for our pupils with speech, language and communication needs. This includes increasing our knowledge about SLCN, understanding how difficulties may present and most importantly how we can support these children in school.

The 'Top Tip for supporting pupils with SLCN' document was created by the Speech, Language and Communication Outreach Team based at Central Primary School (Watford). This aim of this document is to provide educational professionals with information, strategies and resources to support pupils with SLCN in their return to school. Although the content is aimed at supporting pupils with SLCN many of the strategies will also support other pupils their speech, language and communication skills.

What is SLCN?

Some children and young people find it difficult to listen, understand and communicate with others and may need support to develop the surprising number of skills involved. SLCN is the umbrella term most commonly used to describe these difficulties. It stands for Speech, Language and Communication Needs. Children with SLCN may have difficulty with only one speech, language or communication skill, or with several. Children may have difficulties with listening and understanding or with talking or both. Each child also has a unique combination of strengths. This means that every child with SLCN is different. (Afasic,2020).

Four key terms of SLCN

Receptive Language	The ability to understand information. It involves understanding the words, sentences and meaning of what others say or what is read.
Expressive Language	Being able to put thoughts into words and sentences, in a way that makes sense and is grammatically accurate.
Speech	The expression of ideas and thoughts by articulating vocal sounds.
Pragmatics	These are the skills that we use in our daily interactions with others. They vital for communicating our personal thoughts, ideas and feelings.

Is SLCN common?
Speech, Language and Communication Needs, or SLCN, is quite common. It is estimated that around 10% of children starting school have SLCN – that's approximately 2-3 in every classroom. (Afasic 2020). In some disadvantaged areas 50% children start school without the requisite language skills. (ICAN, 2020)

For more information we highly recommend the following video.

Introduction to
Speech, Language and Communication Needs
(SLCN)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZmArof-vgg
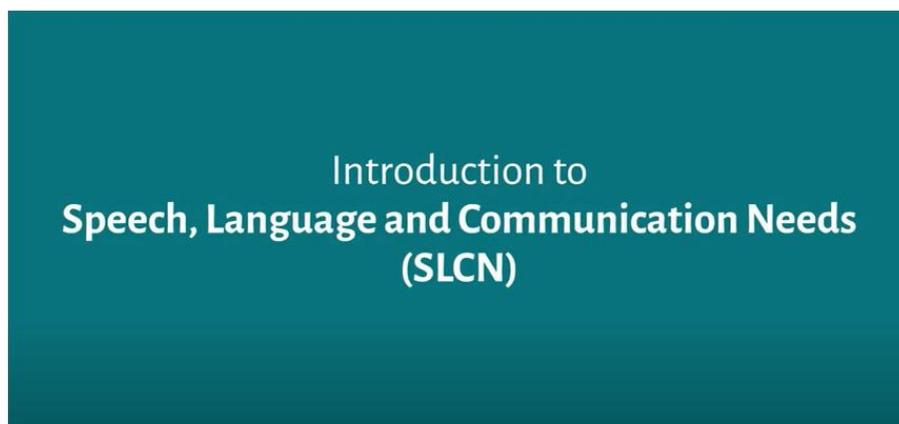
What is Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)?

Many of you may have heard the time developmental, language disorder or DLD, but what does it actually mean?

Developmental Language Disorder or DLD (previously known as Specific Language Impairment or SLI) is a persistent type speech, language and communication need that cannot be explained by an obvious cause.

DLD is not the only label that is used by professionals to describe unexplained difficulties with talking and understanding such as speech and language disorder and language learning impairment. This can be confusing for professionals.

DLD may be identified in children when their development of talking:

- falls behind that of other children of the same age
- interferes with everyday life and school achievement
- is not due to hearing loss, physical abnormality, acquired brain damage, or lack of language experience
- is not part of a general delay of development that affects all other skills.

You may notice that a child doesn't say very much, his/her talking seems immature, he/she may struggle to find the right words, and doesn't seem to understand what is said. Difficulties with talking are not always easy to spot and may be hidden behind difficulties with paying attention, following instructions or getting on with others.

(Afasic, 2020)

Raising Awareness in Developmental Language Disorders (RADLD) state that there are 2 pupils in every classroom with DLD. For further information regarding DLD we highly recommend the following two videos.

DLD 1,2,3

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQ-s02HWLb0

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD):
The consensus explained

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZ1dHS1X8jg

Listening and Attention

Listening and Attention are essential for the development of speech, language, communication skills and learning. They enable us to focus on information and process it. If these skills are insecure, then what we build on them will be patchy and inconsistent as it lacks a stable base.

Strategies to promote listening and attention skills

- Make it easy for them to look at you

- Use the child's name so that they know that you want them to listen

- Consider the class seating arrangements

- Give learning/movement breaks-these only need to last 2 minutes e.g. go and get a drink or put something in the bin

- Explicitly teach children 'good listening skills'

- Keep language simple.

- Use visual support

- Check information has been understood

- Refocus the child by saying their name

- Give specific praise e.g. great looking

Receptive

Children with receptive language difficulties often struggle to understand words, sentences and the meaning of what others say. This includes:

- vocabulary
- grammar
- semantics (word meanings and connections)
- instructions
- questions
- stories
- inference
- implied meaning
- idioms and jokes
- remembering information

A child with receptive language difficulties may:

- avoid work by using distraction techniques e.g. going to the toilet or sharpening their pencil
- look blank, giggle, pull faces, cry, hide or hit out
- respond inappropriately

- echo or parrot other people's speech
- copy others
- change the subject
- present with literacy difficulties
- have poor listening and attention skills
- be unlikely to ask for help

Strategies

1. Ensuring the child is attending to you before speaking.

2. Cue the child in using their name.

3. Be aware of the complexity of language you are using with the child

4. Be aware of the language demands of the whole class

5. Simplify instructions, repeat them using the same language and use visual support/gestures

6. Allow pauses between sequencing commands (to allow processing time)

7. Encourage children to use strategies to process information e.g. explaining what they have to do to an adult or peer

8. Encourage children to tell you when they don't understand

9. Emphasise key words by using slight stress

10. Use multi-sensory approaches to teach vocabulary
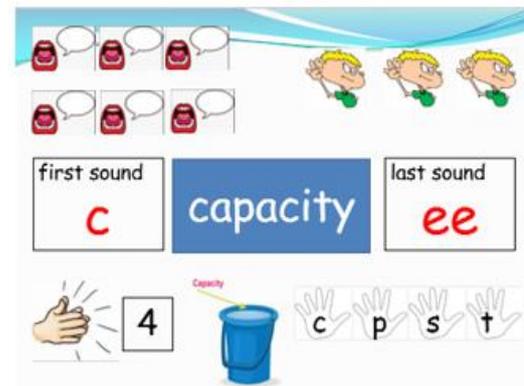
Expressive

Children with expressive language difficulties find it hard to use words, sentences, speech and writing to convey meaning. This includes:

- Knowing/finding the vocabulary
- Putting words together into a sentence
- Using grammar correctly
- Constructing a narrative or story.
- Relating an event so that the listener understands what happened.
- Explaining and describing
- Using language to reason
- Generate novel utterances
- Difficulties saying what they mean
- Talking about an irrelevant topic

A child with expressive language difficulties may:

- Talk; too loudly, too quickly, too slowly or not at all
- Use few words

- Lots of gestures
- Miss out words
- Invent words
- Muddle or misuse syllables
- Muddles pronouns, tenses or questions
- Difficulties recounting events (sequencing)
- Lack of understanding of conversational rules

Strategies

1. Wait- give the child time to say what they mean

2. Comment more that question

One question to four...

Comments
Repetitions
Expansions
Explanations
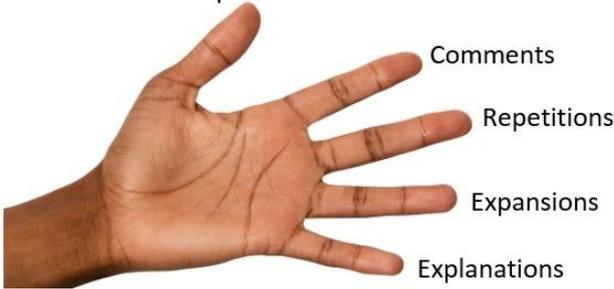
	Child says	You say
Comment	"Bike"	"You like the bike"
Repetition	"Big truck"	"Big truck"
Expansion	"Green apples"	"Yum, juicy green apples"
Explanation	"She is happy"	"She is happy because she is playing with her friends"

3. Ask open ended questions e.g. what did you do at the party?

4. Help children with word finding difficulties by promoting- forced alternatives, what does it look like? Can you show me? What do you do with it?

5. Use turn taking games

6. Barrier games

7. Opportunities to talk to peers (partners/group work) e.g. sharing weekend news

8. Ensure children can achieve success at tasks that don't rely on spoken language (gestures, drawings, drama)

9. Visual strategies

10. Manage the child's turn so they hear models of good language first
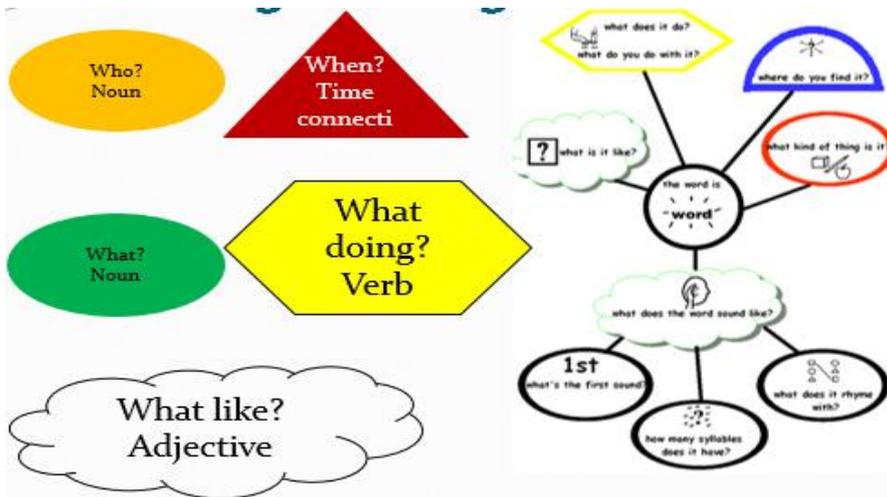
Speech

Speech difficulties are a type of speech, language and communication need (SLCN). Children may take longer to develop a range of speech sounds and need some help with their unclear speech. This may present as:

- Difficulty with telling the difference between sounds
- Difficulty with the articulation (making) of sounds
- Difficulty with combining sounds in words
- Difficulty saying longer words
- Difficulty with the rhythm, flow or 'tune' of speaking

Strategies

1. React to what the child says; not how clearly he/she speaks

Often children don't realise that they are mispronouncing words so correcting them is confusing

2. Repeat what the child says correctly so the child hears good examples e.g. *I like toys at cool- yes you like stories at school*

3. Don't make the child repeat words-children need to feel relaxed and confident to experiment with sounds

4. Build self esteem

If part of the child's conversation is understood, repeat back. That way the child will feel some success (it may encourage them to tell you more).

5. Don't pretend to understand- ask the child to show you and encourage gestures/mime

Sometimes you have to admit that you don't understand. Play a game where a child has to act out the word without saying it to encourage this strategy-this could be fun as a group or whole class.

6. Children may be able to articulate a sound but not use it in a word- this is quite normal

The best strategy is to repeat the words correctly. Sometimes SaLT is needed.

Pragmatics

Some children have difficulties with the social use of language, communicating with others and with interaction and play skills. Pragmatic skills include:

- Intelligibility and how a child uses their voice e.g. pitch, volume and intonation
- Non-verbal communication
- listening skills
- Awareness of the needs of the listener
- Turn taking
- Initiating, maintaining and completing a conversation

A child with pragmatic difficulties may:

- find it hard to understanding social language and the social rules of conversation
- struggle to make and maintaining friendships
- find it hard to understand/infer other people's feelings
- have difficulties understanding and using non-verbal communication e.g. eye contact or facial expressions
- struggle initiating conversations
- say things which are inappropriate
- talk too much and give details which are not necessary
- provide too little information or respond with one word answers
- find it hard to stay on topic in conversations

Strategies

1. Use social stories to model appropriate social behaviours and help a child understand what is happening/plan what to do

2. Use role play to practice social skills

3. Provide opportunities for children to develop turn taking skills in structured activities e.g. board games

4. Use talk partners and pair children with 'good models'

5. Provide opportunities for structured talk and use speaking frames/ sentence stems to scaffold children's thinking

6. Use a visual timetable to provide a consistent routine

7. A "Now /Next" board can help to give structure to a school day and support a child to handle activities that are not self-directed

8. Discuss any changes to the routine prior to it happening – back this up with visuals/a social story
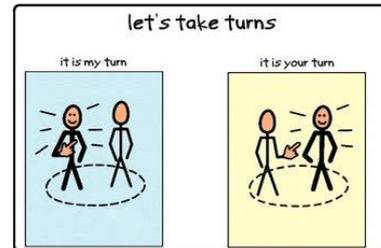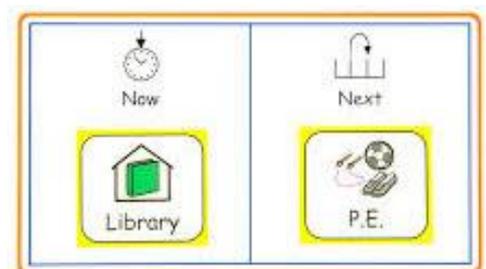
Communication friendly environments

A communication friendly environment should make communication as easy, effective and enjoyable as possible. It should provide opportunities for everyone to talk, listen, understand and take part. A communication friendly environment will support the development of all children's communication skills including those with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). Developing a communication friendly environment helps remove barriers to communication. A communication friendly environment will also support learning, social and emotional development. (This information is taken from https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/643570/making_your_place_great_for_communication_final_1__june_2018.pdf)

Why do we need a communication friendly environment?

- To help children to understand things that are said to them
- To help you to understand what your child is telling you
- To help to reduce frustration, anxiety or challenging behaviour caused by not understanding the spoken language they hear.
- To support attention and listening skills
- To help children access lessons and activities
- To support memory skills
- To increase independence and confidence

How to make your environment more communication friendly
- Use more gestures e.g. beckoning somebody to ask them to come to you, pointing and looking more
- Use sand timers to let a child know how long they have to complete an activity
- Use objects of reference e.g. showing the Numicon for Maths
- Show objects, pictures and symbols to support understanding e.g. showing a brick and some straw whilst telling the story of 'The Three Little Pigs'
- Use a visual timetable
- Put in place a now / next board
- Change your tone of voice and facial expression to add meaning to what you say e.g. ask a question and have a puzzled expression on your face

The following checklist comes from The Communication Trust
https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/643573/communication_friendly_environments_checklist_june_2018.pdf

Communication friendly environments – checklist

You can use this simple checklist to think about how your environment supports children's communication.

Elements to consider

◆ Space, light and layout

☐ Is there good light, with a comfortable temperature and not too many visual distractions

◆ Noise levels

☐ Are noise levels conducive to learning – what can be done to minimise unnecessary noise?

◆ Use of visual support, this may include

☐ A colour coded map of school or setting, colour coded directions, photographs of staff members, photographs/ symbols used to support routines, eg washing hands, getting ready for PE

☐ Visual timetables used for daily / weekly activities

☐ Objects, pictures and symbols used to teach vocabulary, to make stories more active and support engagement in other lessons

☐ Displays are used throughout school or setting to support learning

◆ Adults who can prioritise communication, this may include adults who

☐ Have knowledge of language development.

☐ Understand the language levels of the children and the language demands in the environment.

☐ Can adapt their language so it is not a barrier to learning or communication.

☐ Give children strategies to say when they don't understand

◆ Routines

☐ Are children aware of rules and expectations?

☐ Do they know daily routines; could these be supported visually?

☐ Are children given opportunities within lessons to say when they don't understand?

☐ Are they explicitly taught how to listen, how to work together in groups?

☐ Are there opportunities for children to interact and use language in different situations, with different people at an appropriate level?

Useful links

- www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

- http://www.ican.org.uk/

- http://www.blacksheeppress.co.uk/

- http://www.elklan.co.uk/

- http://www.communication4all.co.uk/

- Clicker 6

- In Print (widget)

- Children's Speech & Language Therapy Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust

- www.afasic.org.uk