Session 1.4

Strategies and Support for Children with SLCN

TOTAL TIME – 1.5 HOURS

Resources required:
- Videos – YouTube links are given on relevant slides

Session aims

- Be aware of strategies to support all children's speech, language and communication development, including those with SLCN

- Identify strategies which can be embedded into your current practice

1 min (0:01)

By the end of this session you will….

What affects speech, language and communication development? Research evidence shows...

- The **amount** of language children hear is important
  The **more** they hear, the **more time** their parents spend talking with them and the **more types of words** they are exposed to, the more children use.

- **What** adults say to children is also important
  Children seem to develop strong language skills when parents ask **open-ended questions**, ask **children to elaborate**, and focus on **topics of interest** to the child. **Responding to what the child is talking about** and **having familiar routines** also promote shared understanding.

- **Co operative interactions** are very important
  Conversations about **how people feel** and **how that affects what they do**, are important in learning social communication skills.

4 mins (0:05)

These studies are based on parents' language – however, the principles are equally important for those who work with children and young people.

*"The role of language in children's early educational outcomes" report, led by Sue Roulstone, looked at what it is about a child's early environment which can influence their language development - showing that **the communication environment is a more dominant predictor of early language than social background.***

In the early stages of language development, it is the particular aspects of a child's communication environment that are associated with language acquisition rather than the broader socio-economic context of the family – Influential factors in the child's communication environment included the early ownership of books, trips to the library, attendance at pre-school, parents teaching a range of activities and the number of toys and books available. The research found that what the mother did (in terms of activities and interaction with her child), had (in terms of resources) and felt (in terms of feeling supported and sense of wellbeing) in the first two years of her child's life was shown to be important in children's performance at 5 years.

These areas are particularly evidenced within early years work, for example, this is also reinforced in the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) work where language is a key quality indicator. For more information please follow the below link:
http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/research/keyresearch/earlyyearschildcare0910/eppe/eppe/

When can you support speech, language and communication?

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- Any time – all the time!
- In everyday routines and conversations
- In all activities, play and social times
- Set up specific opportunities/ activities
- 1 to 1 and in groups
- When children are talking with you or with other children

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2 mins (0:07)

SLC can be supported all the time in everyday routines and activities. However, it's also important to consider and implement activities which focus predominantly on SLC.

Supporting children's SLC in peer-peer interactions as well as adult-child is very important.

Key principles

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- Listen to and value the contributions of children and young people
- Consider their level of development – where they are now and where next
- Model good communication
- Make language learning fun
- Work with parents and carers
- Include speech, language and communication in your planning
- Make the most of opportunities throughout the day
- Keep an eye and make a note

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2 mins (0:09)

These principles apply for all ages.

"Keep an eye and make a note" is important to enable people to make sure children are progressing in the ways expected.

Supporting the speech, language and communication of young children

Learning to Talk, Talking to Learn has 10 top tips:

1. Get the child's attention first
2. Make learning language fun
3. Use simple repetitive language
4. Build on what the child says to you
5. Demonstrate rather than criticise
6. Imitate the child's language
7. Use all the senses to teach new words
8. Give the child time to respond
9. Be careful with questions
10. Use the full range of expression

15 mins (0:24)

Watch video (6 mins 33) but pause after the clip demonstrating each strategy and go through the discussion points in the notes below (note – not all items have discussion points but you can still pause after each strategy and check that participants understand the strategy).

This is a DVD clip which is available online: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=joqVklnnPoY

It provides an introduction to supporting SLC skills in the early years.

1. **Getting attention**
   - *Look at the child you are talking to at their own level*
   - *Remove distractions e.g. if a child is holding, looking at or distracted by something during an activity.*
   - *Think about the areas in which we play and learn. In an area where children listen to stories and need to employ good listening and attention skills, try to limit the visual and auditory distractions e.g. try to limit displays and mobiles so that there is less visual distraction around large group areas, try to organise the session so that background noise is reduced at group times.*
   - *Saying a child's name to get them to stop, look and listen*
   - *Using a light touch on an arm*
   - *Using a sound or music e.g. 'Tidy up time' background music.*

2. **Make learning fun**
   - *Practitioners may also play around with words, sounds and sentences outlining to children how words sound, rhyming words, numbers of syllables in words.*

3. **Use simple repetitive language**
   - *Saying words slowly and clearly and emphasising key vocabulary will help children learn new words in play and everyday situations. E.g. with zoo animals, 'you have the zebra, I've got the leopard', 'my leopard runs fast'.*
   - *Language is often repeated in stories and songs and children enjoy learning the words and phrases. Children enjoy hearing stories and songs repeated day after day. When they are familiar with language they can understand some of the language before they can use it for themselves. E.g. a baby can anticipate the 'tickle' when the practitioner begins the rhyme 'round and round the garden'.*

4. **Build on what the child says to you**
   - *When reinforcing and expanding language, practitioners may find that they often add words which are related to size, a colour concept, a describing word or an action word (verb) e.g. 'run'. Try to make sure that you use a mixture of word types not always number, colour or size.*

8. **Give the child time to respond**
   - *There is some research (Stahl, Robert J May 1994 Using 'Think Time' and 'Wait Time' Skilfully in the Classroom) which shows evidence that some children can take up to 7 seconds to listen to some information, process it and then respond. This is really important because as adults, we can sometimes be too quick to fill the gap and leap in before the child has had a chance to properly process, think, plan and make their response. It's important to remember that children need time before we jump to their assistance or ask them again.*

Supporting the speech, language and communication of young children
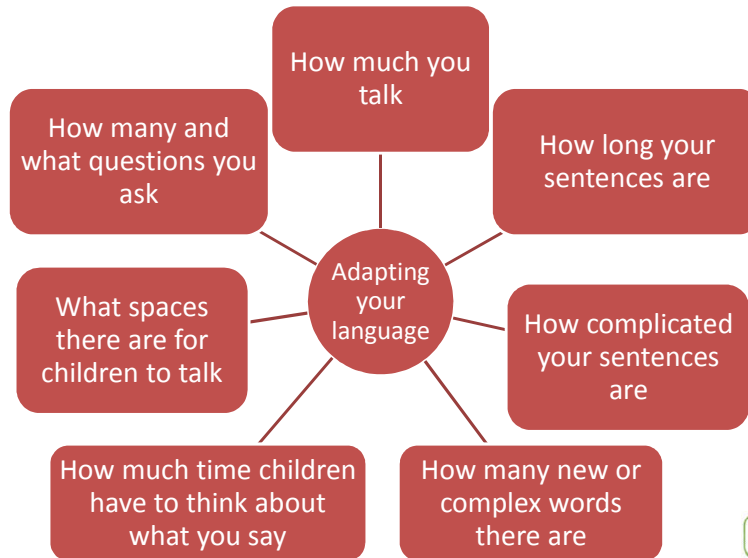
- Choose a technique from the list on the previous slide. Discuss with a partner your thoughts about this technique

- Which of the techniques do you currently use?

- Choose one technique you haven't used before and make a plan to use it in your setting.

10 mins (0:34)
- 5 mins to discuss in pairs/small groups
- 5 mins for a few people to share

3 mins (0:37)

Throughout adult talk, it's important to make sure that children have time and space to think and to talk.

A key point is that adults should make sure they have a good sense of where a child's level is, to pitch their own language at about the 'right' level, so that it is accessible to the child. Where there may be new or more difficult things, the adult then offers enough support to help the child successfully understand.

It's also important to think about how well you set the context. It's useful to support what you say with, for example, visuals like signs, symbols, picture, gesture, concrete examples.

There are examples of some of these strategies on the next 2 slides.

Adapting your language – examples

- Pacing: Adults use a slow pace during conversation; give children plenty of time to respond and take turns in interacting with them.

- Pausing: Adults pause expectantly and frequently during interactions with children to encourage their turn-taking and active participation.

  Adult: "How do we call this? It's a... pancake!" Adult: "What day is it today, do you know?.... It was Monday yesterday so it's... Today is - Tuesday!"

- Confirming: Adults respond to the majority of child utterances by confirming understanding of the child's intentions.

  Child: "My grandmother has rabbits in her garden". Adult: "That sounds interesting, tell me about the rabbits later"
  Child: "Look Miss!" Adult: "Oh look what you've done! He's made a car!"
  Child: "Miss, look at my star!" Adult: "Oh wow... this is a big bright star!"

- Imitating: Adults imitate and repeat what child says more or less exactly

  Child: "It is my sister's birthday on Saturday". Adult: "Is it really her birthday? How exciting"
  Child: "Miss look at my tower". Adult: "Oh wow... look at your tower!"

3 mins (0:40)

Talk through slide

Adapting your language – examples

- Commenting: Adults comment on what is happening or what the child is doing at that time

  Adult: *"Charlie, that's a great design".*
  Adult: *"A spider! Your favourite animal!"*
  Adult: *"I like the way Alfie and Tiana put all the blocks together to build a really tall tower."*

- Extending: Adults repeat what child says and add a small amount of syntactic or semantic information.

  Child: *"Because Cinderella was scared of her sisters". Adult: "That's right. Cinderella was scared of her two horrible sisters".*
  Child: *"My mummy brought me here". Adult: "Your mummy's brought you here has she? She's seen you to the gate. Here she is!"*
  Child: *"Chimney house". Adult: "Chimney that's like the one we saw when we went on our walk".*
  Child: *"Look at my dress". Adult: "It's a very beautiful summer dress".*

- Labelling: Adults provide the labels for familiar and unfamiliar actions, objects, or abstractions (e.g. feelings).

  Adult: *"When someone doesn't feel excited in a nice way, we say they feel…(pause) upset"*

2 mins (0:42)

Talk through slide

Adapting your language – examples

Scaffolding: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55-SIwjXngI
Questioning: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNdHzFkKfBE

20 mins total (1:02)
- Roughly 5 mins per video
- 5 mins discussion time after each video (as a large group)

Video about technique of 'scaffolding' – i.e. building on what a child says - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55-SIwjXngI – 4 mins 35

Video about strategy of using questioning – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNdHzFkKfBE – 5 mins 48

Watch videos one by one, followed by a discussion in the group after each:
- *How much do you consider these strategies in your everyday practice?*
- *How could you do more of this in your practice?*

Strategies to support children and young people's SLCN

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Many different strategies e.g.

- Adapting adult language and communication
- Enhancing the environment
- Using resources and tasks
- Supporting confidence and self-esteem
- Facilitating communication between peers
- A focus on areas of speech, language and communication

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Will vary according to child or young person's:

- Age
- Needs
- Interests
- Targets
- Priorities
- Setting
- Level of support in place

2 mins (1:04)

Talk through slide

Adapting and modifying adult language and communication to support SLCN

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- Label actions and objects with one or two words at a time
- Use new or target words frequently
- Model to support their language
- Minimise words that they won't understand
- Chunk information
- Pause after important points
- Use gestures or signs to support what you say
- Give instructions in the order that they need to happen
- Use reminders
- Avoid idioms which may be confusing

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5 mins (1:09)

Adapting your own language is an important part of supporting children and young people with SLCN. It is another example of taking a good universal strategy, but adapting and modifying it to provide more targeted or specific support for a child or young person with SLCN.

Some ideas are more appropriate for children of different ages or with different levels of needs.

This is particularly important for attention and listening and understanding, but also will help with other areas too.

Talk through strategies:

- **Label actions and objects with one or two words at a time** – so it is easier for children to match what you say to the object or action

- **Use new or target words frequently** – repetition is important for all children, but especially those with SLCN

- **Model to support their language** – model what they would say in that situation if they could. Make sure to keep your language at their level or just above when modelling – ie if the child speaks in 1-2 word utterances, keep your language at around 2-3 word utterances where possible.

- **Minimise words that they won't understand** – use simple language

- **Chunk information** – rather than giving a long instruction or description, break it up into short chunks (e.g. 2-3 words each), and give separately.

- **Pause after important points** – to emphasise and to give time for processing and understanding.

- **Use gestures or signs to support what you say** – pairing visual support with what you say supports children's attention and understanding, and may make information easier to remember.

- **Give instructions in the order that they need to happen** – rather than using words like "before" and "after".

- **Use reminders** – visual reminders are helpful where possible.

- **Avoid idioms which may be confusing** – e.g. "think outside the box", "nip it in the bud" – these expressions can be very confusing for children with SLCN!

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Adult talk
Once we're all sorted and we've tidied up the bricks especially, we're going to go outside and have a run around before we settle back in for painting.
What were you thinking this morning, walking around like that?
The purpose of the people's reaction is clear under the circumstances
Get your coat after you've finished your drink
I expect more of you

10 mins (1:19)

Look at the adult talk here and think about how it could be amended to be more accessible to children with SLCN. How could it be reworded?

Get ideas from the group first, then highlight any points below that haven't been covered in discussion.

'Once we're all sorted and we've tidied up the bricks especially, we're going to go outside and have a run around before we settle back in for painting.'
- This item highlights how sometimes it is the quantity of information which causes problems.
- This information could be really simplified and also well-supported with pictures or symbols like a visual time line – e.g. Tidy up. Play outside. Come in. Painting.

'What were you thinking this morning, walking around like that?'
- This is not clear.
- The question could be taken literally (e.g. The child could think the teacher wants to know what they were thinking, rather than it being a rhetorical question to express frustration!).
- It is also referring to an event which happened in the past, which may be difficult for the child to link with his current telling-off!

'The purpose of the people's reaction is clear under the circumstances'
- Sometimes children have difficulties with general vocabulary such as 'purpose', 'reaction', and 'circumstances'.
- This statement also requires children and young people to 'read between the lines'.

'Get your coat after you've finished your drink'
- The word order here does not match the order of the instruction – children may stand behind their desk and then finish their drink.
- Before/after is a common conceptual difficulty for children with SLCN.

'I expect more of you'
- There is a high inferential load here and 'expect' is quite an abstract concept – what does the adult expect?

Reflections and actions

- How can you make some small adaptations to your language to support children's speech, language and communication development?

- What are you already doing that you can do more of?

11 mins (1:30) – or any additional remaining time

Consider asking participants to discuss their responses to these questions in pairs/small groups first, before sharing responses with the wider group.

It can be very hard to change our behaviour as adults, as many of the ways we use language and interact are really entrenched. So be kind to yourself and choose something small and achievable first!

Is anyone brave enough to commit to a change and have a colleague observe them?