The Communication Trust
Every child understood
Session 2.3
Speech sounds
and
Involving children with SLCN
and their parents
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Session aims

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- Be aware of the typical way in which children's speech sound systems develop
- Know when to be concerned about a child's speech sound development
- Learn some strategies and ideas to support the development of children's speech sounds
- Understand the importance of involving children and young people with SLCN
- Be aware of some strategies to help you to involve children and their families in their support

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Speech sound development

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What does it mean?

- Speech is how children use sounds to form words – it's the sounds we use for talking
- There are 'rules' for speech sounds – for example, in English, a word will never start with 'sb' – but 'sp' 'st' 'sm' 'sn' and 'sk' are ok
- There is a developmental order in which children typically learn how to say different speech sounds
- Children's speech development and understanding of sounds is really important for literacy development
- It also includes things like fluency, volume control, intonation, voice and resonance

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Speech sound development

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Luke is 4 years old. As you listen to his speech, and watch him, think about:

- What is he struggling with?
- Are there any particular sounds that you notice are difficult for him?
- What does he use to help him get his message across?
- What sort of impact might his speech difficulties have on Luke's development?

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Onqn_7xzp2Q

Speech sound development

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Typical speech sound development

- Children follow a typical pattern of speech sound development
- We expect them to make particular errors in their speech, affecting particular sounds, at particular ages
- For example, it's very typical for a 2 year old to say 'nana' instead of 'banana', or 'tat' instead of 'cat'

Delayed speech sound development

- Children with delayed speech sound development are following the typical pattern of development, but are not reaching the milestones expected
- For example, a 5 year old saying 'tat' instead of 'cat' would have delayed speech sound development

Disordered speech sound development

- Children with disordered speech sound development are not following the typical pattern of speech sound development
- They will make unusual mistakes in their speech, which aren't expected at any age. For example, saying 'kog' instead of 'dog', or missing off the first or middle sound in a word are unusual error patterns in speech

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What causes speech sound difficulties?

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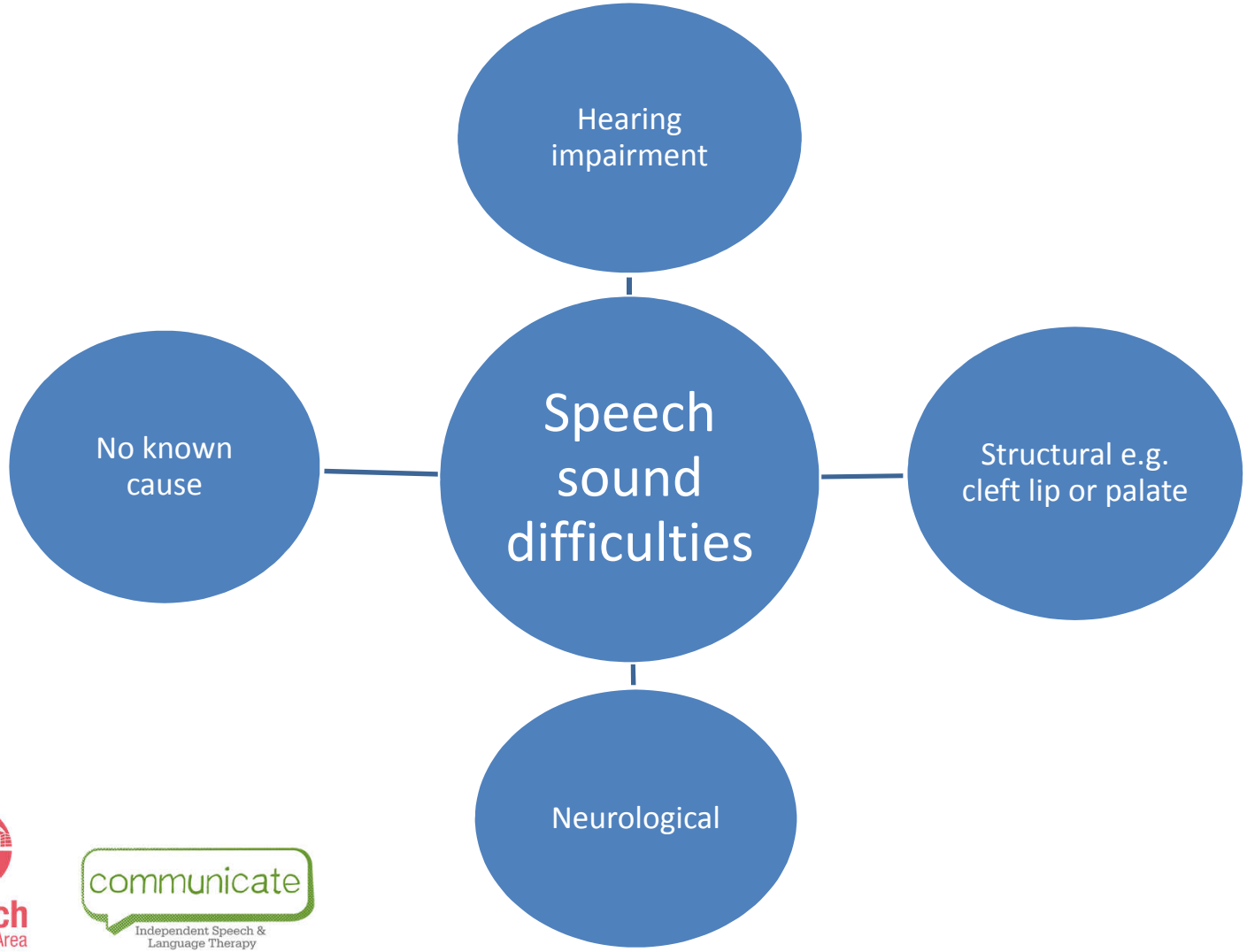

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Development of speech sounds

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Age	What to expect
12 months	- Using early sounds in babble – 'b', 'm', 'd'
18 months	- Words will be unclear, but will be consistent
2 years	- Speech will still be unclear, and this may be a cause of frustration!
3 years	- Expect most sounds to be used at this age, with some immaturities still present such as cluster reduction, and difficulties with more complex sounds such as 'sh' 'ch' 'j' 'th' 'r' and 'l'
4 years	- Some sounds may still be produced in a slightly immature way; 'r' 'l' 'th' 'sh' and 'j' might still be difficult sounds for the child to say
5 years	- By this age children should be able to use most speech sounds – though some longer, multi syllabic words might be difficult. There may also still be some cluster reduction present where there are 3 consonants in the cluster e.g. 'scr' - 'r' and 'th' may also still be produced in a slightly immature way

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Activity

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- In pairs, have a conversation about your day/your evening/your weekend… each of you has different speech sound errors:
  - Person 1 – You are ‘fronting’ the sound ‘k’. You need to replace all these back sounds with a front ‘t’ sound
  - Person 2 – You are ‘stopping’ the sound ‘f’. Rather than the air flowing through, you are ‘stopping’ it to a ‘b’

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Some typical errors…

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Name of process	Example	Error usually resolved by age…
Voicing	**P**ig → **b**ig **C**ar → **g**ar	3 years
Final consonant deletion	Bus → bu Hat - ha	3 years
Fronting	**C**ar → **t**ar **G**irl → **d**irl	3.5 years
Stopping	**S**ock → **d**ock **F**unny → **b**unny	3 years
Weak syllable deletion	Banana → nana Telephone → tephone	4 years
Cluster reduction	Spider → pider Flower → fower	4 years
Gliding	**R**ing → **w**ing **L**ong → **y**ong	5 years

How do you support children's speech sound development?

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What are some of the ways that we already support children's speech sound development in our setting?

Think about:

- Targeted groups?
- Everyday strategies?
- Specific activities?

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Strategies to support children's speech sound development

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- **Repeat sounds back in the correct way –** don't correct the child, but say the word back to them, so they have an opportunity to hear the sound – say the word a few times if you can
- **Emphasise sounds –** when you are modelling the correct sound in a word, put a slight emphasis on the sound that you want the child to listen to
- **Specific praise –** Let the child know when they have said a sound well – 'that was brilliant! You said 'cat' with a 'c' sound!
- **Don't pretend to understand –** make it out to be your fault if you can't understand a child, and encourage the child to use gestures, or to show you if you can't understand them
- **Try some sound awareness activities –** syllable counting, listening out for rhymes, listening out for sounds in words are all helpful

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Involving Children with SLCN

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- The Code of Practice is clear that children must be involved in deciding what support they need and the goals they want to achieve.
- Children and their parents must be enabled to participate as fully as possible in decisions.

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Involving Children with SLCN

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Each child has different strengths and needs, therefore there is no blanket approach for involving children in decision making. Some key approaches are:

- Find out as much as you can about the child's speech, language and communication. Use observations, screening tools or information from speech and language therapists if available.
- Use a child's strengths to support the process – use materials and activities that interest them.
- Support spoken language with additional supports like pictures, photos or meaningful objects.
- Build a picture of what is motivating for the child – you can do this through interaction and also discussion with parents.

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Involving Children with SLCN

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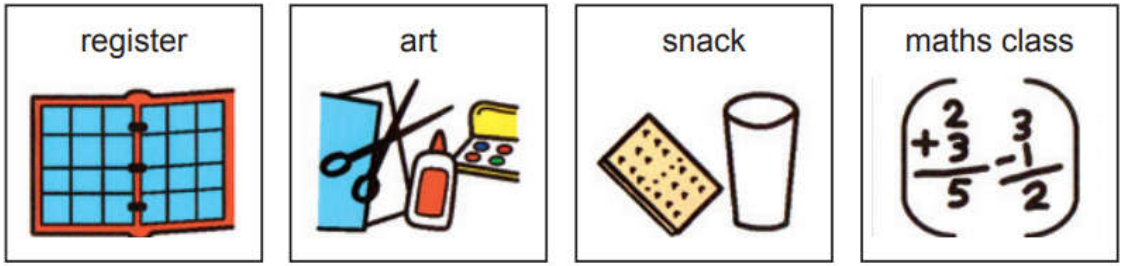

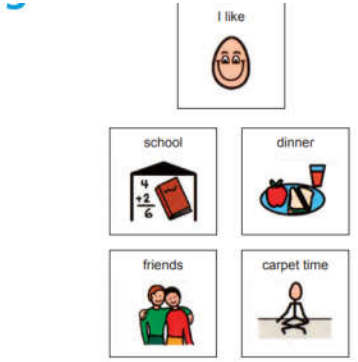

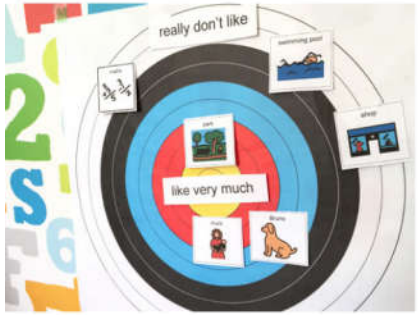

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Involving Children with SLCN

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Some general strategies for involving children and young people with speech, language and communication needs

Here are some important considerations to help all children and young people with SLCN be involved. Use these tips in your daily practice and focus on ongoing conversations rather than one-off consultations:

- **Really know me...**The person talking to the child or young person should be familiar and trusted. He or she should know how the pupil communicates and how to support this effectively.
- **Record how I communicate...** And keep adding to this over time. Make sure all staff know where to find this information.
- **Talk to me in a way I understand..** Some children and young people with good spoken language can still have difficulties understanding language, try to gather information about any gaps in a child or young person's understanding.
- **Make sure all information is accessible...** Use symbols, photos or sign if required to support understanding and accessibility.
- **Let me use what I need to communicate...** Make sure there is access to any method the child or young person needs to communicate to the best of their ability.
- **Pitch your language at the right level...** Think about the child or young person's learning level and then pitch your language at this level. It is always good to:
  - Use simple language and avoid jargon
  - Use short and simple sentences
  - Build in pauses, to give time for processing and responding - don't speak too quickly
  - Make sure the child or young person has a way to let you know if they have not understood
- **Think about where you talk to me...** Make sure it's somewhere familiar that feels safe and comfortable and has few distractions
- **Keep it flexible...**Use methods that are accessible and fun. There are lots of ways for children and young people to express themselves besides speech, such as art, drama, photography, music or role-play.

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Involving Children with SLCN

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- **Give me practice...**Many children and young people with SLCN lack experience in making decisions, so bear this in mind. Give time for them to prepare for meetings beforehand and always check you have understood correctly.
- **Make time...**to think about the best approach, to prepare materials, to meet with the child or young person and then to turn what comes from that into meaningful outcomes.
- **Often it is hard to say what I dislike...** Pupils may need lots of practice at expressing what they don't like. This could be because they don't understand the language, or because they are afraid of saying the wrong thing.
- **Ask me how I want you to support me...** It may be that the child or young person might want to look at the information first before they go through it. Maybe they want to do a bit at a time or do it with a friend.
- **Talk about *now* rather than the future...** Thinking and talking about the future relies on experience, language skills and the ability for abstract thought. Finding out from children and young people what is important to them in the future can be best achieved by: asking them about *now* - what is going well and what could be **better?**
- **Check I understand the concepts you are asking about...** Abstract concepts (ie 'when you're an adult') and vocabulary around feelings can be hard to understand. Check that these, plus any key vocabulary you use (ie 'annual review') are understood.
- **Think about the questions you ask...**
  - "How?" and "why?" questions can be hard to understand for pupils with SLCN; "what?", "where?" and "who?" are easier. Try not to go through a list of questions – it doesn't make for an equal relationship.
  - Pause after asking a question for at least 10 seconds (and longer if a child or young person is using a communication aid) to give them enough time to answer. Try not to ask questions you already know the answer to.
  - Using open questions or statements is a good way to open up discussions. However narrower questions can be easier to answer, e.g.: **"What food do you like for breakfast?"** can be easier than **"What food do you like?"**
  - Sometimes pupils get used to answering "yes" to everything. So, for important information always check back with them.

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Involving Children with SLCN

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- **Use visual supports (objects, photos, symbols)...** Many children with SLCN have stronger visual skills and use visual supports. Using pictures can help us to remember what we have said and to record the conversation. It's also a good idea to keep paper with you, so that you can draw pictures as you talk together.
- **Follow my lead...** This shows that you are interested and enables children and young people to share what is most important to them.
- **Show me what we are going to do and how we'll do it...** Demonstrating tasks and methods of involvement will help children and young people to contribute as fully as possible.
- **Start with the concrete...**Children find it easier to talk about what they have just been doing, rather than what they did last week or at the weekend.
- **Don't judge me...** Whilst we may disagree with what children and young people have to say, or find views challenging, it's important to respond in the same way to negative as well as positive comments.

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Discussion

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- What strategies are in place in our setting already?
- How are we involving children with SLCN?
- How could we do better?

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Involving parents/ families

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- Meaningful engagement with parents and families takes time, and this needs to be factored into a setting's approach.
- Parents may be at different stages in their understanding of their child's SLCN, which requires sensitive and responsive support from staff.
- Staff need to be skilful in identifying and where parents are in terms of their understating and acceptance of their child's SLCN.

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What does good parental engagement look like?

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- The people who support my child know him/her well. I feel they are knowledgeable, tolerant and supportive of my child, understand what interests him/her and what is important to my child.
- I contribute to decisions about my child – through reviews and also the partnership I have with the setting my child is in.
- I am informed of choices for my child, and am supported in understanding the choices.
- My child has targets around increasing his/her independence and communication skills that we can also focus on at home.
- My child's education and experience reflects what matters to them – it is personalised.

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Reflections and actions

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- How do you already support children to develop their speech sounds/sound awareness?
- Is there anything you could do more of?
- How do you make sure that you include parents and children's views?
- Is there anything you could do more of, or change in order to help parents and children feel more involved in decisions about the support they receive?

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