Identifying children with speech, language and communication needs

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This session will provide

• an understanding of the importance of early identification of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and the principles that support effective identification

• an overview of how to recognise children with SLCN and to learn about some of the tools and resources to help with identifying children with SLCN
Learning outcomes: you’ll

1. Understand the importance of early identification of children’s speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)
2. Understand principles that support effective identification of children’s speech, language and communication needs
3. Be aware of some different ways in which children may not follow typical speech, language and communication development
4. Be aware of how to recognise children who may have SLCN
5. Be aware of tools and resources which can be used to help identify children’s speech, language and communication needs
Revising speech, language and communication

| Speech is:                      | • Speech sounds (pronunciation of words)  
|                               | • Fluency  
|                               | • Volume  
|                               | • Intonation  
|                               | • Pitch  
| Language is:                  | • Words (vocabulary) and their meanings  
|                               | • How words go together – their order and how this can change meanings (e.g. the difference between statements and questions)  
|                               | • Grammar – for example how word endings change meanings (e.g. past tense)  
|                               | • Sentences joining together to make sense – narratives, stories we share with each other  
|                               | • Higher level skills such as reasoning, inference  
| Communication is:             | • Non-verbal communication – for example body language, facial expression, eye-contact, gesture and signing  
|                               | • Conversational skills and rules – for example listening, turn-taking, knowing when and how to start (and finish) talking, how to change topic and using language in different ways |
Early Identification of SLCN

- Children with speech, language and communication needs can often go undetected.
- One of the most important factors for children with SLCN is early identification. Early identification ensures that children can be provided with the support they need as soon as possible.
- The **impacts** for children and young people who have difficulties with speech, language and communication are many and varied.
The importance of recognising children and young people with SLCN

Impacts of SLCN

- Building and maintaining social relationships
- Literacy
- Mental health
- Educational attainment
Why is early identification important?

Learning

Behaviour

Speech, language and communication

Social development

Emotional development
Prevalence of SLCN

- Children who do not follow the expected pattern of development for their speech, language and communication at the expected times are described as having Speech, Language and Communication Needs - SLCN
- Difficulties with speech, language and communication (SLC) are surprisingly common
- There are a number of factors which are linked to speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)
- Sometimes, there may be a combination of factors
- For some children and young people, there is no known reason or cause for their needs
Recognising children and young people who may have SLCN

- Recognising children and young people who may have SLCN is based on
  - Having a good understanding of the ages and stages of speech, language and communication development
  - Observing and recording what a child can do, as well as the things they may find difficult
  - Considering speech, language and communication if a child or young person is having difficulties in ANOTHER area of their development or life
  - Getting the views of the child, young person and their parents
  - Using tools and resources to help you
  - Sharing any concerns with others
Children and young people learning more than one language

• Children and young people do not have SLCN simply because they are learning more than one language. Additional language learning is not an indicator for SLCN, nor are limited English skills, where the home language is developing as expected.

• However, some children who are learning more than one language will have SLCN.

• This is because developing speech, language and communication skills is difficult for them whatever the language and they would have difficulties whether they were learning two languages or one.

• It is really important to identify these children's needs, but it can be quite difficult.
Every child or young person’s SLCN will be different and individual

- May be in one, more or all areas of SLC
- Will vary in terms of the **level** of need and the **impact**
- SLC may be the **only** or primary need OR part of another condition or need
- Skills may be delayed or disordered/atypical
- May be short-term OR persistent
Recognising SLCN

May indicate Speech, Language and Communication Needs
Recognising SLCN – two possible approaches

Ages and stages resources

• Check to see if the child is at the stage you would expect for their age
• If not, see what stage they are at in the different areas of speech, language and communication
• Look at ways to help and seek advice and support

Indicators checklists

• Using your knowledge and observations of the child or young person, highlight the behaviours on the checklist which the child/ young person shows
• Seek advice and support on ways to help
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.’
**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 coordination 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 a specific speech and language impairment (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 Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) seemed appropriate.
Principles to support early identification of SLCN - observing and reporting

This is important because:

• You gain a picture of their speech, language and communication skills

• You can check this against ages and stages to see if they are on track or if there is cause for concern

• Over time, you can use observations to monitor progress

• Children’s communication can vary greatly depending on the context

• Reflecting on observations can help improve your practice in supporting speech, language and communication
Observing speech, language and communication – Principles of good practice

• Be clear about the **purpose** of your observation
• Look at speech, language and communication as part of the whole child
• **Planned** and **spontaneous** observations are both important
• Children and young people and their parents should know what’s happening, why and have opportunities to share their views
• Once is probably not be enough...
• Include information about the context
• Note carefully
Observing speech, language and communication – Principles of good practice

There are a number of skills needed for a case study

• **Observation** – watching what the child, and others involved, do and say
• **Recording** – making a careful note of your observations and the context
• **Checking** – using information on development to see if a child is on track
• **Analysing** – using your observations and being clear about what you have found out, using examples to explain
• **Evaluation and reflection** – what went well, what the child’s successes were and what you could improve next time
Raising concerns

• If you work with young children, you may be the first professional to have concerns. Raising these effectively will support early identification and intervention, which are crucial to support children’s development and minimise the potential impacts.

• However, this may also be the case if you work with an older child or young person.

• Many children and young people have had their speech, language and communication needs MISSED completely.

• Lots of other children and young people may have been identified as having a DIFFERENT need.

• For some, their difficulties only really come to light in primary or secondary school.
Processes and procedures

• Have a think about the processes and procedures that you would follow if you had concerns about a child’s speech, language and communication development

• It is important to bear in mind how to gather information from parents and gain consent for onward referrals as necessary
Useful tools and resources

• The Communication Trust
  www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/resources
  – Ages and Stages Resources: Universally Speaking; Small Talk; ages and stages posters
  – Indicators resource – Appendix 1 in ‘Don’t Get Me Wrong’

• ICAN Talk Paper ‘The Cost to the Nation’
  http://www.ican.org.uk/What_is_the_issue.aspx

• www.afasic.org.uk
What next?

Get in touch

• enquiries@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk
• Next Communication Trust Thinking Thursday – Supporting all children’s speech, language and communication development and skills
• You might be interested in...‘Supporting Children and Young People’s speech, language and communication’ – level 3 CPD qualification.
#CPHVACPD

At our 2012 Unite/CPHVA conference we launched #CPHVACPD, and are currently in ‘beta testing’ on the Community Practitioner Journal website.

CPHVA members will be able to undertake a #CPHVACPD module as part of today’s training session which they will be able to access next week at http://www.communitypractitioner.com.

This will include some multi-choice questions and an area for reflection. Once completed, members will be able to store or download their certificate.

We plan to launch this #CPD resource to the wider health sector in the coming months.
How to stay in touch and keep up to date...

• Our website [www.unitetheunion.org/health](http://www.unitetheunion.org/health)

• Make sure your membership details are up to date – so you get all our emails, e-bulletins, texts and letters.

You can contact Unite membership on (UK) 0330 123 3003 or (RoI) 1890946 241, or click on the ‘MEMBER LOGIN’ button - at the top right corner of the website home page, to register, and/or update your account (at [www.unitetheunion.org](http://www.unitetheunion.org))

• If you receive one of our professional journals (Community Practitioner, Mental Health Nursing). Make sure you read it!

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