

I CAN Factsheet 2

SUPPORT FOR PROFESSIONALS: Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN): Classroom Strategies for Primary Schools

This factsheet is primarily designed for teachers working in mainstream schools who have children with speech, language and communication needs within their class.

It aims to provide simple practical techniques to help these pupils. The approaches are relatively straightforward to be incorporated into mainstream classroom practice. They may also be beneficial for other pupils.

Each individual with speech, language and communication needs will be different, but here are some general strategies which may help:

Share knowledge with others who have worked with the child:

Find out what worked for the child in previous school / pre-school. What didn't work?

If a child has an Individual Education Plan (IEP), a transition to school meeting may have been held between parents, teachers and any other professionals involved. The IEP will be reviewed as the child moves from one class to another. Check if the IEP includes any information on the environment which may affect how the classroom is set up.

Eye contact and cueing in:

Arrange the room and seating to make eye contact easy. If you're going to ask the child a question, use their name first. Then they know they have to listen.

Coping with change in the classroom:

Many children with SLCN find both sequencing events and coping with change difficult:

Use visual timetables in the classroom. Use objects, pictures, photos or symbols to illustrate activities, breaks and other events on this timetable. Give the child advance warning that change is coming, and tell them what new activity will take place. Use a verbal countdown to the change of activity, music or a sand timer or if appropriate refer to a specific time on the clock. Use a social story to show the child what will happen.



Make it visual:

Help with sequencing by using simple flow charts made up of pictures, photos and numbered boxes on a sheet. These help to describe activities or events e.g. a school trip or a Christmas concert. Create distinct areas in the classroom for resources for different Subjects. Label these areas and the equipment and containers. Use photographs, pictures and symbols as appropriate to the child's cognitive level. Reference charts with pictures / symbols and key vocabulary can help children to make contributions in different subjects. Give the child alternative ways to make their contributions. For example, a choice board can help a child develop independence.

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Use name labels (with photographs) to identify where children sit and put their things. A class poster with children's names and photographs will help with socialisation. Develop visual representations of preferred behaviours. For example a picture of a person walking to encourage children not to run.

Encourage children to use other methods of communication as well as speech to represent pieces of work, e.g. gestures, drawing and facial expressions.

Make listening easier:

Use simplified language and give information in chunks of one or two words at a time. Leave gaps between these chunks for the child to process and understand the information.

When you give a set of instructions ask another child to repeat then back so that the child has a second chance to listen. Always support verbal language with visual cues to engage children. Use gesture, facial expression, pictures, objects, puppets, story sacks, signing etc.

Provide things for the child to touch, hold and smell. When the child needs to focus on listening, make sure their desk is clear of clutter, as they may be easily distracted. Be aware of the background noise and the impact of visual display, as these could be interfering with the child's attention.

Always reward and praise good listening and looking.

Check:

Check through with the child the vocabulary and skills you want them to use. Explain what is going to happen so the child can see what is coming next. Talk about different parts of the task in the order you want them done and use pictures, photographs and symbols for reference. Check comprehension – look at their facial expression, ask them to re-tell you what they have to do, or to demonstrate it. Praise the child throughout to encourage them to follow the task sequence.

When you ask a question offer forced alternatives - 'is it a liquid or a solid?' or ask the child to select the object or show you, using particular equipment. There are many different ways to answer a question.



Adult language:

Beware of the ambiguities in the language used with children. Some children with language difficulties take phrases such as 'pull your socks up' very literally. Many will be confused by a teacher who says 'off you go then' meaning that children can now get on with a piece of work: Children with SLCN may well get up to leave!

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Be consistent in the language used for the same activity in different contexts – this can help the children to transfer and generalise their learning. It helps if all staff refer to activities and places by the same names, not using, for example, ‘break time’, ‘play time’ and ‘free time’ for the same thing. These need to be agreed by all staff working with the child, the same goes for any signing system used.

Encourage an “asking friendly” classroom by praising children who say “I don’t understand”. Adults may want to introduce a ‘traffic light’ system so children can indicate if they have understood, e.g. the child shows a red card if they’ve not understood at all, an amber card if they need some more explanation and a green card if they know what to do. An alternative is to use the thumbs up/down approach or use a lap card.

Be aware of the child’s behaviour:

Playtimes can be challenging for children and highlight poor play skills and difficulties with social interaction. It is important that staff at these times understand the child’s difficulties and know the best way to support them.

Supporting interaction during these times can make a significant difference. It may also be useful to brief other children and use a buddy system. Coping in school can be very tiring and frustration can trigger behaviour problems. Some inappropriate behaviour can be deflected by giving some positive ‘time out’ or an activity that changes the focus of attention, e.g. using a construction toy as a break from listening or writing. The activity can be used as a ‘working for’ reward.

Support social communication

Create regular opportunities for supported peer to peer interaction. This can be structured in a range of ways depending on the context. Use pictures and symbols to indicate desired social behaviour. For example turntaking, listening. Consider a “buddy” system whereby another child in the class supports the child with difficulties. For example at break time or set up activities the child likes away from the rest of the class.

Work with parents / carers

To ensure consistency at home and school, work closely with parents/carers. Explain what you do in school and why. It may be appropriate to invite parents into the classroom to observe what school does or video the child to discuss at a later date. Share new topic vocabulary with parents / carers so that they can reinforce new words at home. This might be done through a home school book, this is always useful to give the parent/carer a cue for discussion of what the child did in class. Always involve parents in any target setting for the child and keep them fully informed of progress.

Hidden problems:

Children with SLCN are often very good at covering up their problems. They may always follow the crowd as they don’t understand language enough to take the lead. Literacy may be a real problem and the underlying skills of sound/letter knowledge and segmenting may need to be focused on. It is always useful if possible to have access to a formal assessment by a SALT to give a true picture of the child’s understanding.

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Impact:

SLCN can impact on many areas of a child's development including self-esteem, behaviour, academic and social. Self-esteem can be fragile and needs to be nurtured. Use positive feedback and whenever possible be specific and describe the behaviour/skill you are pleased about. Having a reward system for the whole class in which the language impaired child can take part will increase the child's feelings of worth and belonging and help them to achieve the task.

Useful contacts:

Afasic

2nd Floor
50-52 Great Sutton Street
London
EC1V 0DJ
Helpline: 08453 55 55 77
(Local call rate 11am—2pm Monday - Friday)
For information, advice or if you just need to talk.
Tel: 020 7490 9410
www.afasic.org.uk

NAPLIC

National Association for Professionals concerned with Language Impairment in Children)
Chicklade House
Hindon
Salisbury
Wiltshire
SP3

CALSC

(Communication and Learning Skills Centre)
PO Box 621
Sutton
Surrey
SM1 2ZS
www.calsc.co.uk
Tel: 020 88642 4663
National Literacy Trust
68 South Lambeth Rd
London
SW8 1RL
Tel: 020 7587 1842

Further reading:

Communication skills and classroom success: assessment of language learning disabled students

C. Simon
College Hill Press Inc, 1995

Inclusion of Children with Speech and Language Impairments

Kate Ripley, Jenny Barrett, Pam Fleming
David Fulton Publishers, 2001
ISBN 1-85346-729-4 £15.00

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I CAN Factsheets:

You may also find these I CAN Factsheets helpful:

For professionals:

- **Factsheet 3**
Classroom Strategies for Secondary Schools
- **Factsheet 4**
Pupils with Speech Dyspraxia
- **Factsheet 5**
Pupils with Asperger Syndrome

Further support:

- **Factsheet C**
Useful Contacts
- **Factsheet D**
Useful Reading

I CAN:

I CAN is the children's communication charity. Communication is the essential 21st century life skill – the foundation on which children learn, achieve and make friends. I CAN works to develop speech, language and communication skills for all children. I CAN's particular focus is children who find communication hard.

I CAN works to ensure all people who have a responsibility to children, either directly or indirectly, from parents and teachers to policy makers, understand the importance of good communication skills.

I CAN supporting your work in the primary years:

I CAN has a range resources and programmes to support primary years practitioners to develop the communication skills of all children.

- **Primary Talk**

A school based learning programme providing a systematic approach to improving the communication skills of all children at Key stages 1 and 2 through staff training and service development. It enables school staff to create communication-supportive environments to support all children and ensure effective school based provision for children with speech, language and communication needs.

- **Talking Point**

The first stop for information on children's communication. Visit www.talkingpoint.org.uk to access essential information on supporting children at home and within the early years setting.

- **Primary years resources**

- ***The Communication Cookbook***

- Great activities to help develop speech, language and communication in children starting primary school.

- **Targeting Talk**

A unique online resource providing staff with the confidence, knowledge and tools to assess and develop pupils' speaking, listening and language skills.

- **Short courses and work place training**

Innovative approaches, knowledge and best practice to support the skills development of all children. To book online go to www.ican.org.uk/training

Visit www.ican.org.uk for further information on I CAN's work and to register for I CAN's monthly newsletter.

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