

Gloss **A**ry

Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)

Communication in its broadest sense is the foundation life skill. The development of a child's communication skills has an impact on their literacy, school performance and employment prospects as well as their emotional wellbeing and behaviour.

The processes involved in communication are complex and interlinked and the different aspects of communication interact with one another. To communicate effectively we use speech and language. Speech is the ability to combine sounds together meaningfully to say words. Language is the ability to understand words and sentences so that we can follow what is being said to us. It also involves organising our thoughts and ideas meaningfully and using appropriate words and word-parts to express them correctly in sentences. Communication, as used in the term SLCN, means using speech and language appropriately to interact with other people.

Most children acquire speech and language with relative ease, and although children vary in the age in which they first start to talk, there are key developmental milestones.

Examples of speech, language and communication needs

SLCN is an umbrella term for the various difficulties that children, young people and adults may have with different aspects of communication such as:

- Problems producing speech sounds accurately
- Stammering
- Voice problems
- Problems understanding what people say

- Problems using words and sentences
- Problems interacting with others

Delays and difficulties in speech and language can provide clues that a child is at risk of reading difficulties.

Some speech, language and communication needs are short term and can be addressed through effective early intervention. Others are longer lasting and will remain with a person throughout their childhood and adult life.

What causes speech and language needs?

Speech and language needs may arise as a result of either neurodevelopmental or acquired conditions. Some conditions are present from birth and individuals may need support throughout their lives. Research has also identified an inherited component. Speech and language needs may also be due to reduced developmental opportunities in the child's environment limiting the child's learning of language. These reduced developmental opportunities are commonly linked to social disadvantage.

Assessment and intervention

A qualified speech and language therapist should assess for the presence and extent of any speech and language needs. Following assessment, a decision would need to be made regarding whether or not intervention is needed and how a child's needs could best be supported, typically in collaboration with others. This would depend on many factors including the nature of the child's speech and language needs, their age and the impact of their needs on their everyday life.

References

All Party Parliamentary Group on Speech and Language Difficulties (2013) *The links between speech, language and communication needs and social disadvantage*.

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Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists *SLCN factsheet*.

https://www.rcslt.org/speech_and_language_therapy/docs/factsheets/slcN

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists *What is a speech and language therapist?* Factsheet.

https://www.rcslt.org/speech_and_language_therapy/docs/factsheets/what_is_slT

Please note: Afasic does not hold copies of any referenced material. These publications should be available at academic libraries.

Organisations that can help

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
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<https://www.rcslt.org/>

The professional body for speech and language therapists

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