

Speech, Language and Communication Impairments



Item Code Nov 07 Edition no 2

0845 300 1818

To replace Speech Impairment fs250023

“The basic motivating factor for all human social behaviour is a lifelong need for human recognition.”

(Dusay and Dusay, 1989)

What are speech, language and communication impairments?

Speech, language and communication impairments (SLCI) are difficulties an individual has in the way they communicate with others or how others understand them. There are various types of SLCI that can occur singly or in combination with other special needs. The causes can also vary – in some cases it is a ‘primary disorder’, this means that there is no obvious ‘other cause’ for the impairment while a ‘secondary disorder’ means that the problem with speech, language or communication is caused by something else such as an accident, condition or disease.

The most common problems occur with basic communication in that this is a two way process and depends both on clear expression on the one hand and full comprehension on the other. Where a SLCI blocks either of these factors a breakdown in communication can occur.

This can result either in the basic gist of a conversation being understood while details remain unclear, or in extreme cases the opposite meaning to that intended being drawn, due to a misunderstanding of a few vital words, facial expressions or gestures.

A common misconception is that a SLCI suggests a lack of intelligence. Often those with communication difficulties have alternative methods of expressing their thoughts, feelings and ideas. Explore with the young person, and their parent/guardian or carer different methods used to get the message across to aid with communication.

Common forms of SLCI include:

- *Articulation* - arising from difficulties in forming sounds. This can result in great frustration to all concerned.
- *Fluency* - often called stammering or stuttering. This can take a number of forms – repeating sounds or words or stretching them out or speaking in a rather jerky way.
- *Difficulty in understanding and using the rules of conversation* – this may impact, for example, on finding difficulty taking turns, or entering or leaving a conversation, being able to make eye contact appropriately, or interpreting facial expression of others.
- Repetitive and expressive language may be affected. Repetitive language describes the ability to understand or comprehend language that is heard or read. Expressive language describes putting thoughts into words or sentences that make sense and are grammatically accurate.
- When the problem is severe, normal communication may be totally disrupted. This may be most noticeable in front of strangers, or when the person is conscious of the attention of others. It may lead to the individual trying to avoid some speaking situations altogether. Teasing by peers is common.

• **Facts about SLCI**

- There are 2-3 children in every class with SLCI.
- 50% of those with SLCI will present behavioural difficulties.
- 6 in every 100 children have SLCI with 1 in 500 experience long term severe difficulties.
- 10% of young offenders are reported to have significant SLCI that may not have been fully recognised, (Hamilton, 1999).

Living with a SLCI

A young person with SLCI may:

- Be misunderstood
- Be thought to be rude
- Exclude themselves from activities
- Attend once and not come back
- Be isolated
- Be at risk of being bullied
- Be taken advantage of socially/sexually
- Risk-take so they can be included – drink/drugs/sex
- Be 'caught' as they do not have the skills to get out of a situation or predict when it is going wrong

Some individuals may work on programmes tailored individually by Speech Therapists, either at home, hospital or school, or a combination of these. In severe cases alternative methods of communication may be used involving sign language or electronic aids. One of the most common sign languages used is Makaton. Others include Paget-Gorman and Bliss, which uses a picture board.

Practical Tips

Stress and attention can exacerbate a SLCI and the best results can be gained by providing as relaxed an atmosphere so that those concerned can feel confident about speaking. Obviously any form of teasing compounds the effect of their condition. Make others in the group aware of the

need to allow time for everyone to speak without highlighting the SCLI difficulties of individuals.

Patience is the key word! Leave time for speech to be thought about and articulated. Don't let others jump in with answers too quickly!

Stammering

If too many speech demands are put upon the individual, a stammer can become more pronounced. Stammering can develop with some individuals who are very sensitive to failure or have low self-esteem.

The experience or loss of control while speaking can be embarrassing for most people, but when it happens persistently it can become humiliating for some making them feel isolated and lonely.

Someone who stammers may find it difficult to approach others either to ask questions or just for a chat. It may be difficult for them to initiate conversations with their peers and any embarrassment may limit their verbal contact with others. This may result in them seeming shy, insecure, alternatively surly or uncommunicative. Patience, understanding and getting to know the individual are the best ways to make the individual more at ease here. Providing opportunities to talk in small non-threatening groups can relieve many of the stresses, which make the stutter worse.

Failure with speech can overshadow other achievements and lead to lower esteem. Ensure that recognition is given for success or competence in other areas which both encourages and redirects attention positively away from the speech impairment and onto the person.

It may seem ironic, but many individuals with speech impairments, especially stammering, can excel in drama or puppetry. Once the attention is drawn away from them as an individual speaking and onto the character they are porting, some individuals find a release which allows for improved fluency.

Some ways to improve communication

- Find out what alternative form of communication he/she may use e.g. British Sign Language or Makaton. Local Colleges often run training courses.
- Offer opportunities for written communication.
- Look directly at the individual when talking to them with your face at the same physical level as theirs.
- Speak using language that can be easily understood and repeated back, if necessary.
- Reduce the number of questions asked, allowing time for individual, short answers.
- Give time for explanations or responses.
- Be aware of the speed of your own speech - if it is too rapid, you may need to slow down a bit yourself!
- Be encouraging, stammering can undermine confidence so that this becomes more important than other strengths – make sure positive focus is given to these.
- If any important communication is being given, get young people to repeat it back to you to ensure understanding; don't just take a nod as confirmation of information being taken in.
- Be sensitive to the size of teams and groupings those with a speech impairment often find large groups of people daunting.

Further Information

Discuss with the individual and/or their parents the extent to which help is needed and learn any practical tips they have to offer. They may be able to arrange a meeting with a speech or language therapist working with the Community Health Team, if it is felt to be helpful.

Support Organisations

Afasic – Unlocking Speech and Language
2nd Floor
50-52 Great Sutton Street
London
EC1V 0DJ
Helpline - 0845 3 55 55 77 (local call rate)
Fax 020 7251 2834

Email: info@afasic.org.uk
Website: <http://www.afasic.org.uk/>

I CAN

4 Dyer's Buildings
Holborn
London
EC1N 2QP
Telephone: 0870 010 4066
Email: info@ican.org.uk
Web site: <http://www.ican.org.uk>

Talking Point

A web site for parents, carers and professionals about speech and language development in children and the difficulties that children can experience with speech, language and communication.

Email: info@talkingpoint.org.uk
Web site: <http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk/>

The British Stammering Association

15 Old Ford Road
London
E2 9PJ
Telephone: 020 8983 1003
Helpline: 0845 603 2001 (Open Monday – Thursday)
Fax: 020 8983 3591
Email: info@stammering.org
Web site: <http://www.stammering.org>

Makaton Vocabulary Development Project

31 Firwood Drive
Camberley
Surrey
GU15 3QD
Telephone: 01276 61390
Fax: 01276 681368
Email: mvd@makaton.org
Web site: <http://www.makaton.org/>

Copies of the Beaver, Cub and Scout Promises in Makaton are available from the Special Needs Office, via The Scout Information Centre (0845 300 1818)