

## What is SLCN?

### What do we mean by SLCN?

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) is the term given to describe the extensive range of needs related to all aspects of communication – from understanding others to forming sounds, words and sentences to expressing ideas and emotions and using language socially.

Children with SLCN may:

- have difficulty in understanding information conveyed through spoken language
- have difficulty in communicating their needs, wants, thoughts and ideas to other people
- not understand the basic concepts of communication and that they can impart information or impact on the behaviours of others.
- find it hard to understand and/or use words in context
- use words incorrectly with inappropriate grammatical patterns
- have a reduced vocabulary
- find it hard to recall words and express ideas.
- have speech and language skills that are significantly behind their peers
- have poor or unintelligible speech

***The different aspects of SLCN relate to each other, overlap and interact. They do not fall into neat categories and neither do children with SLCN.***

"SLCN is not consistently defined. It encompasses a wide range of needs, there is a high degree of co-morbidity and there are variations in the terms used to describe subgroups of SLCN. In addition, a child's SLCN will usually change over time as they develop, meaning that numbers vary by age, type and severity of SLCN." (*Jordan and Thomas 2010*).

## What's the difference between speech, language and communication?

### Speech refers to:

- sounds used accurately to build up words
- processing speech sounds
- speaking fluently (without too many hesitations or repetitions of words or sounds)

### Language refers to:

- speaking ([expressive language](#)) using words to convey meaning
- understanding; processing and making sense of what people say

### Communication refers to:

- the way in which people use language to interact – speaking and listening
- using language for different purposes and situations, for example to question, to clarify, to describe, to debate
- non-verbal communication, for example eye contact, turn-taking, gestures and body language.

## Subgroups of SLCN

SLCN can be viewed in three broad sub-groups (Lindsay, Dockrell, DesForges, Law and Peacy 2010 and I-CAN 2006):

- a. Children with **primary** SLCN where language difficulties occur in the absence of any identified neurodevelopmental or social cause, e.g. specific language difficulties or specific speech disorder. These difficulties could be described as being specific and persistent in their nature.
- b. Children with cognitive, sensory or physical impairment as their primary need and language difficulties as a **secondary** need, e.g. SLCN secondary to autistic spectrum disorder, a hearing impairment or learning difficulty.
- c. Children with SLCN associated with limited experiences (Lindsay et al 2010). These difficulties are transient, i.e. given the right support, children are likely to catch up.

*(Jordan & Thomas, 2010)*

## Why do some children have SLCN?

There may be a variety of reasons why children experience difficulty or delay in their speech, language and communication development but for many children, there may be no clear cause or explanation. In addition, SLCN can occur over the entire ability range.

Some of the reasons for a SLCN may include:

- learning difficulties
- environmental deprivation - a lack of stimulation and support to provide the rich language experiences necessary to develop a child's speech, language and communication skills
- neurological damage or problems during pregnancy or birth that may affect children's developing brains and contribute to their speech, language and communication difficulties as part of a wider developmental delay
- a recognised syndrome or disorder that causes communication difficulties
- a hearing impairment, any of which may impact on speech, language and communication:
  - sensori-neural hearing loss (permanent)
  - conductive hearing loss (of middle ear origin)
  - fluctuating hearing loss
- emotional/behavioural difficulties
- an autistic spectrum disorder which can often include a language delay
- cleft lip and palate
- motor planning difficulties e.g. Dyspraxia
- specific difficulties in using oral muscles effectively, which may affect speech – for example, a child with Cerebral Palsy

*N.B. this is not a conclusive list*



**For more information about SLCN:**

Visit The Communication Trust's website: [www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk) and download publications about SLCN such as *Misunderstood* or *Don't Get Me Wrong*

For more information and examples, refer to the SLCN Inclusion Development Programme (see section 3.3) Module 3 "What are speech, language and communication needs?"

***In the UK, over 1 million children have long term and persistent speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). This can affect them early, severely and for life.***

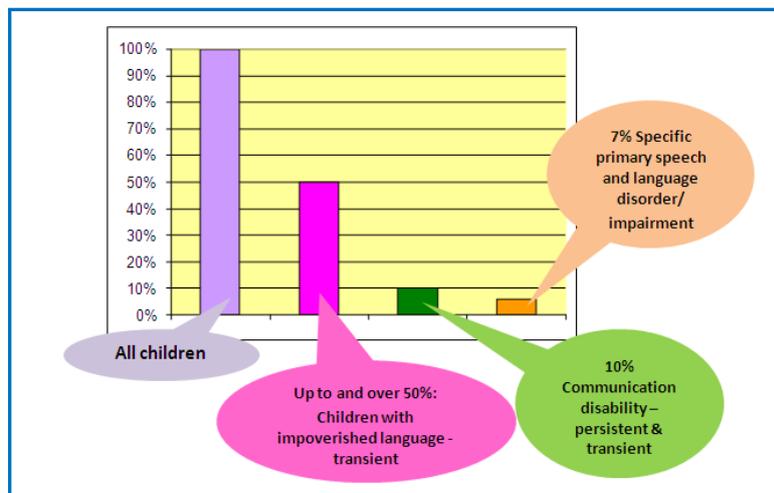
***([www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk))***

## How many children have SLCN?

It is estimated that 10% of all children have long term or persistent SLCN - the most prevalent special educational need identified by primary schools. In Worcestershire this figure is equivalent to 12,000 children and young people aged 0-19 years, with over 6,000 children and young people known to the Speech and Language Therapy Service. Some schools in deprived areas of Worcestershire have identified 50% of all 5 year olds entering school with delayed receptive language skills. Approximately 7% of children have specific and primary speech and language impairments.

***Speech, language and communication difficulties are the most prevalent barrier to children's development today."***

***(ICAN Impact Report 2009/2010)***



This means that:

***In socially deprived areas there can be more than 17 children in each class with language skills below average for their age.***

***In an average class there are 2 or 3 children with persistent communication difficulties.***

***Some children start school with the language skills of a 2 year old.***