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The Link

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APPS TO SUPPORT SLCN
by Sophie Mustoe-Playfair SaLT

UNDERSTANDING PDA
by Ruth Fidler, Education Consultant, and Libby Hill, SaLT

DEVELOPING LISTENING SKILLS IN SCHOOL
by Specialist SaLTs from Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust

DLD AND ME
by Anna Sowerbutts and Amanda Finer, SaLTs

**FREE
PRIZE
DRAWS**



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Editor's Letter

Welcome back – we hope you had a fabulous break and are feeling refreshed, rested and ready for the new term.

Let's leap into the New Year with our brand new issue of The Link, packed with informative articles and case studies to help all primary schools in supporting their children who have SLCN.

Schools tell us how much they enjoy reading The Link and how useful they find the specialist content. We are thrilled to have won a **nasen** award – *The David Ryan Publication Award 2019* in recognition of our hard work. Thank you to all the schools that advocated The Link as a valuable resource and have told us about how it makes a difference to the children they work with.

So, what's in this issue?

We all have apps on our phones and, as technology moves forward, it seems clear that they may be a useful way to reinforce children's speech, language and communication skills, but where do we start? SaLT **Sophie Mustoe-Playfair** has been researching the latest apps – read her reviews on page 3.

What is PDA and what can we do to support children who are often highly anxious and misunderstood? Read **Ruth Fidler** and **Libby Hill's** article to find out more.

The RADLD organisation ran a very successful campaign promoting awareness of DLD around the world at the end of last year and we know that many schools took part. As professionals, what's the best approach in talking to young people about their DLD and how can we work with their parents to ensure their unique qualities are identified

and their needs are met? **Amanda Finer** and **Anna Sowerbutts** provide information on supporting young people with DLD and are offering their new publication '**DLD and ME**' as a FREE GIVE-AWAY.

Kim Griffin OT presents her third article, this time about handwriting and why it's not just the pencil grip we should consider when teaching children to write. Kim is giving away two copies of her book '**Supporting Pencil Grasp Development**' in our FREE PRIZE DRAW.

Liz Spooner and **Jacqui Woodcock** explore how to develop a whole school approach to listening skills and how targeted intervention can have a positive impact. A copy of their resource '**Teaching Children to Listen: A practical approach to developing children's listening skills**' will be sent FREE to a lucky school in our prize draw.

Prompted by the '**DLD and Me**' article, SaLT Louise Bingham's case study describes helping a child and her family understand and come to terms with a DLD diagnosis.

We have been delighted with the response so far for volunteer schools to help us with our new Infant Language Assessment. We still need to recruit more schools for phase 2 of testing, so if you are interested in helping us, and would like to receive £300 of free resources for your school, turn to page 12 for more information.

Please email office2@speechlink.co.uk by the end of February 2020 if you would like to enter our prize draws, become a volunteer school or to tell us about something that is happening in your school or area – we'd love to hear from you.

Have a good term!

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The Link Team receiving **nasen's David Ryan Publication Award.**

www.speechandlanguage.info

Contact our Help Desk at office2@speechlink.co.uk or phone 0333 577 0784



Which Apps support Speech and Language Development?

By Sophie Mustoe-Playfair SaLT

There is a plethora of apps available for your smart phone to enable you to support your children. When it comes to SLCN this is just as true (especially if you are willing to pay for them) but how do you know which apps will be suitable for your child? We asked our Speech and Language Therapist Sophie Mustoe-Playfair to try out some of the free SLCN apps on the market.

Kids Story Builder

(Free) – available on Android

• What is it?

Kids Story Builder is a storyboarding app which is full of potential for various Speech and Language Therapy tasks. You can take your own pictures, sequence them, and record a spoken message to accompany each picture.

• Who is it for?

There's something for everyone here! This app could be useful and appropriate for anyone from EYFS to KS3. Kids Story Builder uses photos taken by the user, so there's no real upper age limit for users to enjoy this app. The app is suitable for younger children too, since it is up to the user to make the content.

• What is it good for?

There are plenty of potential applications. The app would be a brilliant way to explore any expressive language target, allowing you to personalise activities and discuss actions and events that are relevant and meaningful to the child you're working with. There's scope to work on building and extending sentences, sequencing events, using tenses and connectives, and narrative skills. You could also use this for making highly personalised visual timetables, or for developing social stories.

My PlayHome

(Lite version free, full version £2.99)

– available on Apple and Android

• What is it?

A virtual doll's house with scope for lots of receptive and expressive language activities. Users can explore a house and carry out a range of activities with the items they find – they can even blow bubbles!

• Who is it for?

This one is probably more suitable for a younger audience – EYFS and KS1 pupils are likely to enjoy exploring the playhouse and re-creating familiar sequences of play.

• What is it good for?

This is a great source of inspiration for generating all sorts of expressive language and listening activities. You could use this to practise following instructions, and progress towards longer instructions with multiple parts and sequences. There's lots of functional, everyday vocabulary to explore and you could use this to practise building and extending sentences - acting something out and then describing it using target grammatical structures or vocabulary (or make this a listening activity by describing an action for the child to act out). You could work on understanding and using prepositions by hiding objects around the house, or work on understanding and using pronouns by animating the different characters. If this kind of activity appeals to the child you're working with then you will surely have lots to talk about.

Chatterpix Kids

(Free) – available on Apple and Android

• What is it?

Chatterpix is an uncomplicated mash-up of photography and voice recording – you take a photo of anything you like, draw on a mouth, and record something for your DIY animation to say. Watch all of the inanimate objects in your classroom come to life!

• Who would it appeal to?

All sorts of children from EYFS to KS2 are likely to find this app entertaining – and more importantly motivating – for at least a little while, so it's a worthwhile addition to your therapy repertoire.

• What is it good for?

Chatterpix is motivating. It's a simple app, which means it's easy to use and generally reliable, and kids will find it funny. You could use this alongside almost any expressive language activity to encourage talking and practice the child's target skills. It could also be useful as a resource for practising thinking of other peoples' perspectives if you're working on social skills.



UNDERSTANDING PATHOLOGICAL DEMAND AVOIDANCE (PDA)



By Ruth Fidler (Education Consultant) and Libby Hill SaLT

What is PDA?

Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) is increasingly recognised as one of the autism spectrum profiles. People with PDA share some features with others on the autism spectrum in terms of differences in their social communication, social imagination, repetitive and restricted behaviours and sensory differences. Seemingly good social awareness masks high levels of anxiety which means they often struggle significantly to co-operate with everyday expectations or requests. Although others with autism also experience anxiety which can lead to avoidant behaviours, people with PDA are affected in this way to an extreme degree, which impacts on their everyday thinking and behaviour. Children with PDA don't only avoid ordinary requests that many of their peers would view as unappealing such as tests, homework, bedtime etc but they may also avoid events that you may think they would enjoy, that are well within their capability and which are often mundane (i.e. usually non-threatening.) Some individuals with PDA can even avoid expectations they place on themselves. Children with PDA may use a variety of ways to avoid what they perceive as demands including distraction, procrastination, offering excuses, some of which are more plausible than others, physically removing or incapacitating themselves.

Language and communication difficulties often present differently in children with PDA compared to other autistic children. They may have sufficient language skills to be able to mask, argue and 'manipulate' a situation by using social strategies such as distracting or giving many reasons why they aren't able to comply. Their language and communication skills are also enough to mean that many are aware they are struggling, which increases their already heightened anxiety.

Some are extremely articulate, and many of their parents wonder how an SaLT assessment could possibly be helpful for them. However, we need to gain an accurate picture of strengths, as well as understanding what gives rise to some underlying difficulties, so we can help all those living and working with children with PDA to implement effective strategies and enable these often very bright children to maximise their potential.

Some children have difficulty with focusing attention for things they're not

interested in. Many have auditory processing difficulties which stem from sensory integration issues or may also have phonological processing issues. We meet bright pupils who do not have the necessary dual-channelled attention needed for listening in class. They often have an interest in vocabulary, how words sound or alliteration and may use complex terms which give the impression of precocious language skills. Indeed, an appearance of being superior is common and is part of the illusion of being linguistically more able than they are. Often, the reality is that this has become a shield to ward off unwanted approaches.



Children may appear very sociable on the surface but lack depth in their understanding. They have learned the basic rules, so eye contact, starting conversations, engaging people etc may be very good. However, putting these skills into practice in the real, every day, fast-paced world of constant demand is not easy for them.

The effect of these apparent strengths in language and communication means that it's easy for supporting adults to miss making the necessary accommodations for them, we may even be irritated by their responses to us or their avoidance and forget to look at what is driving these behaviours. We can wrongly see them as a child who 'won't' rather than as a child who 'can't'.

What can we do to support?

Effective strategies for supporting pupils with PDA are characterised by being collaborative, flexible, personalised and indirect. These are strategies which may be beneficial to a range of other children and young people with autism as well as other SEND profiles, but they are especially helpful to those with PDA.

Collaborative: Not only do all the adults around a child with PDA need to collaborate, but this collaboration needs to include the perspective of the young person themselves. This is recognised good SEND practice but is especially important for children with PDA who are likely to be even more resistant if they feel their views are not included in processes and decisions. Collaboration will be particularly significant when determining priorities in learning, behaviour, social relationships and emotional wellbeing.

Flexible: A key feature of PDA is variable moods and sensitivities so if the supporting adults can be flexible in the way they present tasks, in the expectations they have around those tasks, and the pace and timing with which they see through those tasks, they are more likely to be successful.

Personalised: Of course, all children are unique individuals but engagement with children with PDA will be improved if we can tailor their learning so it is meaningful and motivating to them. Curriculum adaptations should also reflect learning needs in areas such as self-awareness, independence, emotional resilience, social relationships and problem solving.

Indirect: Children with PDA are often highly anxious and very sensitive to perceived demands being made of them, even within activities they usually enjoy. So, it may be helpful to offer a child carefully selected choices, to phrase ideas as 'thinking out loud' rather than as a direct question, to offer 'invitations' to engage with an activity rather than demands to do so. The more creative we can be in presenting requests in an indirect way the greater the chances are of lowering anxiety and therefore of increasing participation.

Children with PDA can be misunderstood if their presentation of autism is not recognised. This can lead to difficulties sustaining school attendance, managing relationships, engaging with learning opportunities and ultimately can impact negatively on the mental health of a highly anxious group of young people. It is important to understand their distinct profile so that the adults who support them are better equipped to develop approaches which have a more personalised and flexible emphasis than those used with other autistic children.

For more information:
www.pdasociety.org.uk
www.autismassociates.co.uk

There's more to handwriting than pencil grasp!

By Kim Griffin OT

Although a child needs many skills to be competent at handwriting, the first thing that is typically considered when they have difficulty writing is their pencil grip. This is, however, only one element of handwriting. There are many more, including language! In this article Occupational Therapist Kim Griffin, from GriffinOT, will explore the many components of handwriting and some supports that may be helpful.

Give Away!

We have two copies of the book *Supporting Pencil Grasp Development* by Kim Griffin to give away. The aim of the book is to provide a step by step manual of ideas that teachers and parents can use to help children to develop the fine motor dexterity they need to successfully hold their pencil. It is designed for children aged 3½ years and older. It is the perfect programme for young children who are learning to hold their pencil. In addition, it is an excellent resource to use with older children who have an awkward or immature pencil grasp. However, you will also need to consider the other tips in this article, as it won't be the solution for all children!



Freebie

Our Infant and Junior Language Link packages have lots of classroom resources to help children with their writing. Please visit The Link online <https://speechandlanguage.info/the-link-magazine> and download a free copy of our sentence planner – a valuable support to use with your children in the classroom.



Component 1 – Fine motor and visual perception

Fine motor and visual perception skills form the foundation for handwriting. Initially, a child needs to be able to hold and control their pencil. Next, they need to be able to visually identify and recognise letters and words. Then, they need to know how to form letters and words in order to write them down. These are the core areas occupational therapists help with.

For children developing their pencil grasp, additional fine motor activities using their thumb, index and middle fingers can help. This includes water droppers, construction toys such as Duplo and Popoids, and playdough. Puzzles, matching games and reading support visual recognition.

Practice is a key element for learning to write letters and words. This can be done with paint, in the air, with chalk or white boards, and obviously with pens. Apps, such as Letter School and Writing Wizard, can also be useful.

Printed script is much easier for children to learn. In fact, most children in reception are not developmentally ready to learn cursive, despite it being the policy in some schools. Also, learning letters in formation groups (i.e. c, o, a, d, g, q) can be easier for children compared to learning letters in phonics groups (i.e. s, a, t, p, i, n). The UK National Handwriting Association has recently published new guidance for 'Developing a Handwriting Policy' which could be helpful if your school is reviewing its policies.

For older children struggling with the physical elements of handwriting, keyboarding or voice dictation would be a relevant option to consider.

Component 2 – Can the child understand the question?

The next thing a child needs to be able to do is understand the question. In early years classes this is often not a problem. There is continuous modelling and practise so children can see what they need to do, even if they can't read or understand the question. However, understanding a question is a distinct skill which some children need to be taught. Using highlighters to find the relevant information in the question, and practising breaking a question down, can help these children.

Component 3 – Does the child have an idea for their answer?

Children typically fall into two categories here and it's easy to separate them. Some children find writing their answer down really hard. However, if you ask them to tell you their answer they can talk for hours. Others don't write their answer down, but, also can't tell you an answer. These challenges need to be supported differently.

If the child has an answer and great ideas then they might find voice dictation helpful for larger pieces of work. Standard computer software (e.g. Andriod, Windows and Apple) is excellent and in many cases a special programme doesn't necessarily need to be purchased. Voice dictation also makes the child independent with recording their ideas. Other options include using a scribe or writing down the answers for the child to copy.

The child who can't tell you their answer needs a different approach. They might find mind mapping helpful to generate ideas. The map can then be used to create sentences and paragraphs. Often,

children need a lot of practice at this before they can be independent. There is also a piece of software called Mindview which may be useful for older children. In addition, these children may benefit from sorting activities, where potential answers or ideas are given and they need to sort these for relevance.

And finally – what about spellings and composition?

Spelling and sentence composition are other elements of handwriting that go far beyond pencil grasp! Even if a child has a perfect tripod grasp, difficulty with spelling will be a barrier for them to be successful with handwriting. Teachers specialise in teaching spelling and I know there are specific programmes available to support spelling. To facilitate handwriting, one common strategy is to write the spelling out for the child to copy. Another teacher I worked with used to have the child make an attempt but then make a squiggly underline under the words they were unsure of. She called these 'squiggly' words. The strategy seemed to increase the children's confidence and willingness to write, particularly for those who worried about being wrong.

For older children, again software could be useful. Standard auto-predict software (e.g. Google, Andriod, Apple) is improving every year. The programme Clicker 7 is also designed specifically to help with spelling.

In conclusion, I hope this article will help you to look past pencil grip for children who are struggling with their handwriting. Whilst it is a foundation and useful focus early on, a child needs many other elements to be successful with their handwriting.

Author information

Kim Griffin is a paediatric occupational therapist. Her company GriffinOT delivers affordable online sensory training and motor skill development programmes to schools, teachers and parents. For more information visit on our programmes please visit <https://www.GriffinOT.com/SL>.

FREE PRIZE DRAW

For a chance to win a copy of
TEACHING CHILDREN TO LISTEN IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

By Liz Spooner and Jacqui Woodcock



DEVELOPING LISTENING SKILLS IN SCHOOL

By Liz Spooner and Jacqui Woodcock, Specialist SaLTs
Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust

Listening underpins all language development and social interaction. Many children starting school find it hard to share attention, play independently, wait for their turn and follow an adult's lead. This affects their learning but also their ability to make and maintain social

relationships and play appropriately with others. Children who find listening challenging can be demanding of adult attention. They can also impact on other children's learning by distracting them or interrupting the lesson.

Our experience has shown that, given the appropriate intervention, children can successfully learn to listen. Developing a whole school approach means that, once children have learned what 'good listening' means, they are encouraged to use these skills throughout the day.

4

LISTENING RULES

What is good listening?

Poor listeners often don't present in the same way because listening isn't just one skill. Saying 'I need you to listen' is not enough because children do not always understand what this means. Being explicit about the specific behaviour needed helps children to understand what they need to do, and why it helps them to listen is why we devised our rules:

There are four different behaviours that children need to learn in order to be a good listener:

1. Looking at the person who is talking

This is a rule for life. Looking at the person who is talking will help children; in the classroom, at job interviews and when meeting new people and making friends.

2. Staying quiet so that everyone can listen

Teaching children the importance of this rule has the biggest impact in any classroom. Children cannot talk and listen at the same time! There has been a huge rise in the amount of background noise that children are exposed to which means that they are used to talking at the same time as someone else. They have become desensitised to it and may need to be explicitly taught that staying quiet helps everyone to listen.

3. Sitting still

This is a controversial rule and it is certainly true that some children find it easier to sit still than others. However, young children typically have single channelled attention and need to look in order to listen. When they are fidgeting they are distracted by what they are looking at or playing with and so find it hard to focus on what an adult is saying. Practising sitting still in a motivating and positive way will help them to experience success at it and find it easier in future.

4. Listening to ALL of the words

The important bit of this rule is 'all'. Learning to listen all the way to the end of your words will help children avoid making simple mistakes and will save you time.

In our experience, most children, especially at Primary age, want to please the adults that they work with. Once you have taught children these four rules then you all have a shared expectation of what good listening means and you can give them specific praise when you see them following a listening rule successfully.

How to develop a whole school approach:

- **Evaluate Children's Listening before and after intervention using the Listening Rating Scale** – This is a quick and easy tool that enables staff to more objectively evaluate the listening of the children in their class and identify specific patterns of poor listening in their pupils. Evaluating a whole class takes 15 – 20 minutes and allows schools to demonstrate the impact of their intervention.
- **Explicitly teach the rules of good listening** - The 'Teaching Children to Listen' approach enables you to deliver a specific intervention over 6 weekly sessions to teach the listening rules and motivate children to follow them throughout the school day. Each session lasts about 45 minutes and includes

an activity specifically designed to teach each rule. Schools we have worked with report that the greatest impact has been achieved when intervention is carried out with all classes at the same time so that all children are aware of the expectations and teachers know what children are able to achieve.

- **Use your knowledge of what children are capable of** – Remind them of good listening that you have seen; photos are a great way of reminding children of what the target behaviour is. Remind children of the great behaviour you have seen them do. E.g. *"You know that fantastic sitting you did in the bubbles game? Can you show me the same great sitting now on the carpet while we do phonics?"*
- **Work with parents** – Many parents are aware that their children can find it hard to

focus but are not sure how to help. Both of the 'Teaching Children to Listen' books include information that you can share with parents on why listening is such an important skill. The Early Years book also contains games the parents can try with children at home. One of the most helpful things has been to show parents what great listening their children can do when the expectations are explicit. We have sometimes finished our 6 week listening intervention with a special listening group with parents as guests.

And finally....

When listening goes wrong it affects all of the things we try to achieve in school. However, we have found a small amount of targeted intervention can achieve positive changes very quickly.

DLD AND ME:

Supporting children and young people with Developmental Language Disorder

By Anna Sowerbutts and
Amanda Finer SaLTs

DLD and labels in education

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) is a lifelong condition that should be on the radar of all educators. Affecting two children in every class of thirty (a proportion that climbs in disadvantaged areas), DLD describes persistent difficulties with comprehending and/or using language. As awareness and understanding of DLD grows, parents and professionals are increasingly facing the question of how to broach a discussion about DLD with the students themselves.

Ongoing debate around the merits and dangers of applying medical-sounding labels to children has raised valid questions. Treating people differently can lead to stigmatisation but ignoring difference can be insensitive to

their distinct experiences and risks further disadvantaging them. In our experience, students with DLD often have an acute awareness that they are 'different' in some way, but without having the tools and vocabulary to be able to understand that difference, they are at risk of low self-esteem and the perception that they are simply less 'intelligent' than their peers.

Students need to be equipped to understand their strengths and difficulties, particularly as they transition out of the sheltered primary school environment. It is important that this is done sensitively and holistically, however, so that students see DLD not as their defining quality, but as part of their unique selves.

DLD And Me

DLD And Me: Supporting children and young people with Developmental Language Disorder (www.dldandme.co.uk) is a published resource book that supports professionals and parents with this process. It is based on the principles of self-advocacy, and on evidence that shows understanding difference and disability can empower young people. Through guided discussions, worksheets and home activities, students are supported to understand what their unique qualities are, how language works, what DLD is, and how they can ensure their needs are met.

The programme comprises twelve session plans, with accompanying visual resources and activities for follow-up sessions. It is appropriate for children in Key Stages 2-4



HERE ARE SOME TOP TIPS FOR A FRUITFUL PARTNERSHIP:

- Schedule an initial meeting and come with a blank sheet of paper and an open mind. Start by asking 'tell me about your child' – then build from there. Find out what helps the student best, particularly around communication difficulty, and plan together how to adapt teaching to accommodate their differences.
- If you and the parent(s) feel it is appropriate, include the child in this discussion. Approaches such as 'Talking Mats' can be invaluable in this respect, helping students to clearly express what works for them and what doesn't.
- Follow this up with regular check-ins. Setting up a home-school book can be very helpful; both sides can use it to celebrate achievements, raise concerns, highlight issues, problem-solve challenges together, record key vocabulary the child is learning, and note down what activities the child has been doing so they can talk about this and be understood. Make sure the positives in the book outweigh the negatives.
- Once the student is approaching the end of primary school, ask parents how much they have spoken to their child about DLD, and whether they would like any support in doing this. *DLD And Me* can be a helpful way of structuring these discussions.
- Finally, even though the DLD label can be a useful shorthand, never let it overshadow seeing the child as an individual. One parent, reflecting on what had made for a successful partnership with school, commented that 'The thing our educators did well, despite having never heard of DLD, was they sought to understand. They didn't pathologise him, they didn't question his intelligence, they accepted him exactly as he was and worked to get an understanding of how he learned, and then adapted what they did to suit him.'

While labels must always be used carefully, to empower rather than reduce an individual, we feel that teaching students about DLD can have transformative effects. It can reduce any unarticulated sense of shame or self-blame, while simultaneously restoring the student's sense of agency for bringing about change. Teachers are central to this endeavour, and we encourage any interested educators to seek out further information on supporting students with DLD.

(though maturity is more important than age), and can be delivered by SaLTs, parents or teaching staff with a good knowledge of DLD. Families are included throughout, with a parent leaflet and workshop template available to download, and students are encouraged to share what they have learned with their teachers and the important people in their lives. Examples of projects students have created include a class presentation, a school display, and a film about DLD. As a result of engaging in *DLD And Me*, we have seen students grow in confidence and take more active roles within their own education, contributing to their annual reviews and speaking up when they haven't understood something.

Parents as partners

Whether or not a student is ready to learn about their own DLD, a successful school-parent partnership is vital to children with DLD achieving their potential. Parents/carers are likely to know how their child learns and communicates best, and what systems might need adapting. They might also see the consequences

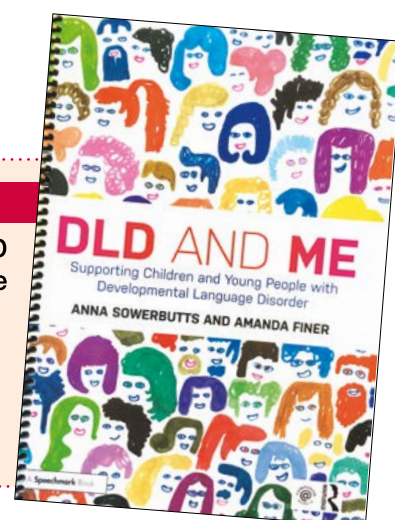
of frustration and distress that children with DLD often mask at school and can let you know if this is the case.

FREE PRIZE DRAW

For a chance to win a copy of **DLD AND ME, Supporting Children and Young People with Developmental Language Disorder.**

By Anna Sowerbutts and Amanda Finer
(Speech and Language Therapists)

www.dldandme.co.uk





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From One TA to Another

Active Listening

By Claire Chambers, former HLTA

Active listening – fully concentrating on what is being said as opposed to passively ‘hearing’ what the speaker is saying.

Reading with great interest *Developing Listening Skills in School* (page 8) really got me thinking about the topic and how important good listening skills are, and how easy it is to take them for granted.

It's not always easy to do. Take the conference I attended last month. I wanted to be there and had particularly chosen the session as I was very keen to hear the speaker. The lights went down, the PowerPoint began, and I began to listen and take notes.

After a while I began to fidget, the chair was really uncomfortable, my neighbour's chewing had developed from a vaguely irritating chomp to a lip-smacking open-mouthed mastication! I was thirsty, hungry and far too warm. I had lost my place in the handouts and, wait for it... yes, I needed the loo!

As the audience burst out laughing at something the speaker had said, I realised that I had missed a large chunk of the session - I hadn't been actively listening.

Now I think it can be safely said that I had

gone off task. The advantage for me was that I recognised this, and, even though the distractions remained, I was able to block most of them out and refocus on what was being said.

When we think about a school environment, is it any wonder that children often struggle to listen? Children who have SLCN are already at a disadvantage when it comes to following what goes on in class and may find actively listening a real challenge. Active listening is not just about sitting still and behaving well. How often do we say, 'Well done - good listening!' How do we know the children are listening? Are we just praising good sitting?

The positives of active listening are numerous; you are far more likely to make and keep friends if you listen to what others are saying and can respond appropriately. It's a vital life skill and needs to be explicitly taught as Jacqui Woodcock and Liz Spooner highlight in their article.

I found these well-known activities helped to settle and focus the children, enabling you to check who is actively listening:

- Simon Says
- Chinese Whispers
- Drawing something following your instructions
- Describing an object and see if the child can guess what it is
- Guess Who?
- Listening to an audio book in class in short chunks
- While reading stories to your children ask what they think will happen next
- Send the child on a very simple errand (go to the office and ask for 20 pencils)

Please let me know of any activities that you use in your schools to help promote good listening and we will share them online.

Email us:
office2@speechlink.co.uk





Ask a Therapist

NEW!

Please send any questions for our 'Ask a Therapist' feature directly to our SaLT Team at:
therapist@speechlink.co.uk

DLD AND ME AND THE FAMILY

By Louise Bingham SaLT

A Case Study

When working as a Speech and Language Therapist in primary schools, I would sometimes work with a child on developing their understanding of their diagnosis, often in Year 6, as a part of their secondary transition work. It wasn't however, until I worked with Sofia and her family that I was able to see the amazing impact that supporting a child to fully understand their diagnosis can have.

I first met Sofia, who had a diagnosis of language disorder, when she was in Year 5. She had significant language difficulties affecting her ability to access learning so, following the changes to language terminology, I updated

her diagnosis to DLD. Sofia's family were originally from Romania and she was bilingual. Her parents mainly spoke Romanian at home but were able to understand and use English well.

Following assessment, I arranged a meeting with Sofia's parents and key school staff, to explain the change in terminology from language disorder to DLD. During the meeting, Sofia's parents repeatedly asked about her behaviour in school (which was exemplary) and about how hard she was working within the classroom. They requested additional homework to be provided and spoke about getting a tutor for her to support her learning. Despite reassurances that Sofia was working very hard in school and that her difficulties with her learning were due to specific difficulties with language, I left the meeting feeling that parents did not fully understand Sofia's difficulties.

Sofia's class teacher was very concerned about comments made by Sofia's parents during the meeting, particularly their focus on behaviour. She didn't feel that the comments made were appropriate and that parents were presenting as very 'resistant' to any support or advice. They wanted to have discussions with parents about secondary placements for Sofia, as there were concerns about her ability to manage within a mainstream secondary school but didn't feel that parents would be accepting of this. In addition, Sofia was becoming more aware of her difficulties in class and had asked her class LSA whether she was 'stupid' or 'deaf'. I knew that I needed to do more to support everyone to understand the diagnosis and what this meant for Sofia.

In collaboration with her parents, I completed a block of therapy with Sofia focusing on supporting her to understand her diagnosis of DLD.

During the therapy block, Sofia was supported to:

- Identify her areas of strength and difficulty
- Understand how language works
- Understand what DLD is
- Identify strategies that help her within the classroom

I felt it was paramount that Sofia's parents were able to attend the sessions to support their understanding and her Mum agreed to attend some of the sessions.

At the end of the therapy block, Sofia and her Mum had a much better understanding of DLD and, in particular, Sofia understood that she is not 'stupid' or 'deaf', and her parents understood that it was not caused by them speaking Romanian. This was a brilliant enough outcome in itself, but there were so many other positives of completing the work that I hadn't predicted.

First and foremost, Sofia was able to understand why she had difficulty with some tasks within the classroom and was now aware that if the task contained words, she was going to find this more difficult and may need some support. Although she was always very well behaved and attended well in SaLT sessions, she now understood why she had therapy sessions and was much more engaged in working on and developing her language skills.

Sofia's parents were so grateful for the time taken to support them in understanding her diagnosis and were then able to open up about their initial concerns and misconceptions about DLD. They explained that where they came from in Romania, children with any difficulties are often viewed very negatively and thought to be just badly behaved. They had found the information about DLD very difficult to understand and accept initially, because Sofia is very well behaved and works hard. Sofia's Mum

expressed that before she was unsure how to speak to Sofia at home about her difficulties because she "didn't have the right words", but after attending the sessions, Sofia and her parents were able to talk about her difficulties and the support that she needs.

Going forward, parents and school developed a very positive relationship and were able to have open discussions about support for Sofia, including supporting parents to think about secondary placement options. Sofia's class teacher was able to reflect on the assumptions that she made initially about the reasons for the parent's reactions to the diagnosis. By taking the time to ensure parents fully understood the information presented, with the opportunity for open discussion and questions, parents and school were able to work together to support Sofia and ensure her needs are met going forwards.

Completing this initial therapy block also enabled me to really get to know Sofia which had a positive impact on further sessions of therapy she had with me. Often, I was only able to see a child for a block of sessions every other term and although I had a good understanding of their language ability, this wasn't always enough time to really get to know a child, particularly if, like Sofia, they are very compliant and quiet. Through hearing Sofia's views of her strengths and weaknesses I learnt so much more about her. I knew more about her personality; she had a wicked sense of humour that caught me off guard a few times. I found out what a brilliant friend she is, how much she loved sports and just how much she detested drama! I had a more holistic view of Sofia and how the diagnosis of DLD fits into her, which I could use to adapt my therapy sessions around her to develop her language skills in a more functional and successful way.

4

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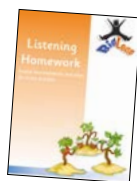
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