The Link ONLINE

FIND US AT **SPEECHANDLANGUAGE.INFO**

ADVICE ON RESTARTING SPEECH AND LANGUAGE INTERVENTIONS

GIVE AWAY

A handwashing social story give away from Speech Link Multimedia Ltd

NEW eBook
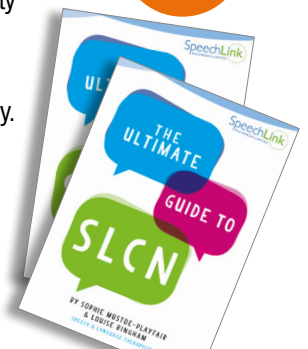
CONTENTS

Editor's Letter

With the recent disruption that has rocked all schools nationwide, the new academic year brings fresh challenges for us all. We know that learners are threatened by a widening attainment gap and that so much time away from the structured learning environment that schools provide will have stilted or indeed stalled development of key skills for some. We can also surmise that there will be children whose needs have gone unidentified because they have spent less time in school, where staff would ordinarily have had the opportunity to unravel their strengths and difficulties.

In this issue we have selected articles that we hope you will find useful as you build a firm foundation for your children to return to, while at the same time looking after yourself and your colleagues.

Speech and language skills are more important than ever and on page 3, **Jules Daulby** recounts how working with speech and language therapists transformed her own teaching skills. She highlights the need for teaching staff to be included in the training provided by local SaLT services, alongside support staff, to build a communication friendly school – employing universal strategies that benefit all children.

We are thrilled to announce the launch of **The Link CPD, our new speech and language training package for school staff**. Your school will benefit from staff who have an increased understanding of SLCN and can use effective strategies to support their pupils creating an inclusive environment. Find out more on pages 8-9.

"We have spent the last 6 months communicating in a very different way," says **Specialist Speech and Language Therapist Alys Mathers**. Page 6, looks at how we can continue to use our new found 'tech' skills back in school with our children who have SLCN.

Sadly, some children and adults will have suffered bereavement or trauma during lock down. **Sarah Helton**, from **Back Pocket Teacher**, shares advice on how to help support each other on return to school.

Why do some children seem to cope well at school but have a melt down once they get home? **Laura Blackman** explains how the huge effort of coping at school impacts on homelife and how we can help reduce the stress and anxiety some children experience daily. Read her article on page 10.

Our **One TA to Another** article shares some helpful tips to help those children who haven't settled in their new class as well as hoped, while on page 4 our new **SaLT**, **Juliet** (welcome Juliet), addresses some FAQs about restarting speech and language interventions once more.

Finally, we are very excited that our eBook – **The Ultimate Guide to SLCN** is now available. We know the importance of developing the SLCN knowledgebase of your workforce for a communication friendly school and our eBook, written by our SaLTs Louise and Sophie, is packed with advice on how to recognise SLCN and where to go next. We are offering our eBook (RRP £23.99) with every completed trial of Speech Link and Language Link. Find out more on page 13.

We send you our very best wishes for a safe start to the new academic year.

FREE GIVEAWAY

DOWNLOAD HERE

www.speechandlanguage.info

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

@SpeechLink

Putting Speech and Language at the Core of Teaching

By Jules Daulby, Educational Consultant

We know the difference that the specialist skills of speech and language therapists make to an individual receiving intervention, but have we thought about how many more children would benefit from these methods, if implemented in the mainstream classroom?

Universal Strategies

The inclusive classroom requires that the specialist S&L practices, used in 1:1 or targeted small group interventions, are embedded into the main class arena. Teachers and leaders need to be mindful of the importance of universal strategies and make them a priority in their school's teaching strategy. (After all, universal S&L strategies are vital for some and harm none!) We've been getting there with quality first/high quality teaching, resulting from the 2014 SEND reforms, along with the message that teachers, not TAs are responsible for their pupils with SEND. What is often neglected however, is the sharing of expertise with teachers. Rather than improving inclusive pedagogy with the help of S&L specialists, many teachers feel they have been given more to do, with fewer resources and no advice or support.

So how do we ensure there is a whole school approach to speech and language?

It requires strong leadership to compel any change, and a recognition of the benefits of true collaboration for the whole school environment. Access to training and CPD is a key part of a comprehensive universal S&L strategy but school leaders must also move beyond this to recognise the potential benefits of smaller scale modelling by the experts and coaching by specialists. School leaders must foster an atmosphere which understands the difference made by universal, classroom-based strategies, easy to implement and for which support materials are readily available. By looking at an overall strategy we can ensure that knowledge and good practice are being disseminated through all members of staff, regardless of their designation.

GOOD PRACTICE IN THE INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

- ✅ A commitment to finding the barriers to learning and removing them where possible
- ✅ Understanding reasonable adjustments and the Equality Act 2010
- ✅ Understanding the difference between the learning process and task completion
- ✅ Understanding that making progress in the time allowed may mean shortening the task
- ✅ Devising scaffolding to help rather than 'do it for them' and encouraging children to develop self-supportive strategies
- ✅ Understanding progress for the individual child which is not based on peers or national outcomes
- ✅ Being able to show progress for that child, capturing the evidence of their individual learning however it manifests

Ask a Therapist

Restarting Speech and Language Work after Covid Disruption

By Juliet Leonard, SaLT

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed constraints on the way support can be delivered to children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs. Getting back on track will require thought, creativity and dedication; attributes that teachers have in abundance!

There will have been uncertainty about how schools will look in September 2020. Both teachers and pupils alike will need time to feel safe and comfortable whilst adjusting to their return to school. Safety and wellbeing underpin learning and these cornerstones are crucial.

Should I test or retest using our speech and language assessments?

We recommend annual testing in the Autumn term and this should go ahead as planned, with some allowance for resettling to the environment. This will help to form a baseline from which to set targets and track progress for the rest of the academic year.

Should I redo the last scheme of work?

It would be worthwhile revisiting previous schemes of work as a recap to moving forward. If these are likely to form the basis of future learning, it may benefit learners to consolidate their knowledge before they build on it. This could be completed in smaller groups. Paired learning with peers, who have more securely consolidated previous work, can also be hugely beneficial.

What about language groups?

Language groups are a proven way to support children with SLCN. Here are some ideas for adapting groups to the current situation:

- Keep group sizes small, selecting pupils in the same class or bubble. More secure language users are good models for others.

- Adapt games to gross motor, physical activities which lend themselves better to social distancing measures.

- Enlarge copies of resources for socially distanced learning, or provide pupils with their own set.

- If group times need to be shortened, keep warm-up and review activities, and carry out just one language activity.

- Special transition sessions, to introduce new rules and recap sessions of previous learning, would be beneficial.

- Try using stamping and drawing activities, instead of shared toys and activities, so pupils can use individual sets of resources.

Staffing, timetabling and space are likely to be factors in determining what can feasibly be provided.

Whilst more language groups are beneficial, it's useful to remember that language learning can (and should!) take place in all parts of school life. Be mindful that time spent in language intervention groups is time not spent in the classroom, and time spent supporting language in the classroom is hugely beneficial, for practising and generalising the skills that children have been learning in their language groups, so that they develop good functional communication skills.

What else can we do as a school?

We know there will be hurdles to supporting children with SLCN on their return to school.

But where there is a will, there is a way to make it work in your school.

Here are a few ideas to consider:

- **Parents on board.** Many parents want to be involved in supporting their children, but struggle to know where to start or where to go next. The Speech Link SLCN Parent Portal can help, with lots of activities that families can do at home.

Consider an online workshop, where parents can carry out an activity with their children using target language. For example, an online 'Potion Workshop'.

- **Playground learning.** A break from being in the classroom can still be fun with a more learning-based activity in the playground. A 'word wall' or 'words of the week' for topic-based vocabulary, or an outdoor reading corner, can be ways to encourage learning to continue in the playground, in a more informal way.

- **Peer partners.** Older children feel an immense sense of pride and responsibility when given a special task. 'Playground language Champions' can facilitate socially distanced games which encourage communication.

- **Conversation prompts.** Conversation starter posters are a great way of facilitating talking between children and their peers, teachers and parents/caregivers. Include target words that children can use in their questions and responses.
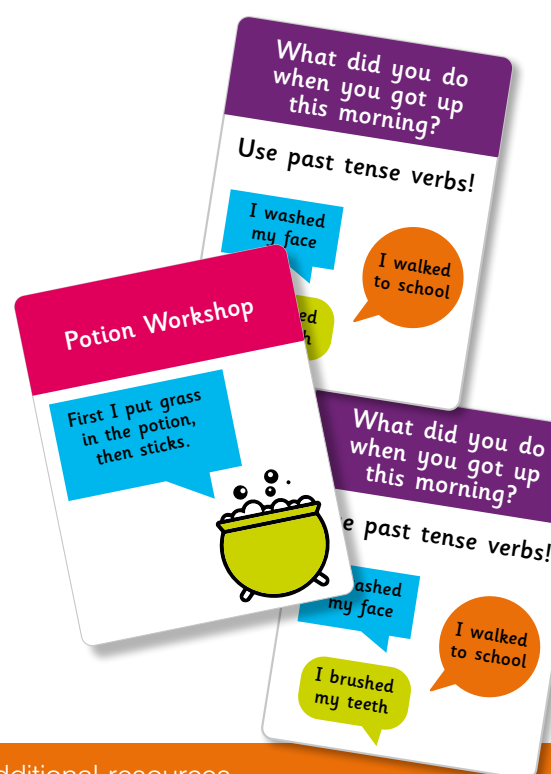
WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER

Visit speechandlanguage.info/parents for additional resources.
Our Help Desk is available from 8.30am-5.00pm every weekday.
Speech Link is here to support you in any way we can.

COMMUNICATING
THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

By Alys Mathers, Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist

Lately, we have all had to get up to speed quickly with technology such as Google Classrooms and Zoom. I'm sure we're all looking forward to seeing people face-to-face again! However, this doesn't need to stop when children return to school as both teachers and pupils can learn from our newly acquired video-conferencing etiquette. Many of the strategies needed for successful video-conferencing interactions, can be transferred into the classroom and will support children with speech, language and communication needs. Here are some of the things to keep up, when learning moves away from the screen:

Take turns to talk: Within a group call, signals for when to take turns need to be very clear, as talking over each other does not work. If pupils have got used to signalling non-verbally, that they want a turn, keep it going. If not, this might be an ideal time to introduce a 'talking stick', or a more subtle way for children to show you they have something to say. This could be a card on the table turned one way or another, to show whether they have something to say just to you, or to the whole class.

Look at the person who is talking: Paying closer attention to facial expressions, and keeping focused on the person talking, can make video-conferencing calls tiring. But learning to look at the person who is talking, is a lesson adults and children benefit from and leads to a far better understanding of what's being communicated.

Make non-verbal communication explicit: Rather than relying on your facial expression, explain verbally what you are feeling or thinking. Some children need this to understand your meaning, either because they find non-verbal communication difficult to understand, or because they may not be focused on the non-verbal messages at that time.

Make any gestures you do use bigger and clearer: Gestures are a great way of helping pupils understand your language, but if you are always waving your hands around when you talk, how will your pupils identify what's a gesture and what's not? Use a gesture when it helps the children understand your meaning, for example for abstract concepts (e.g. full/empty, above/below for younger year groups, or evaporation/condensation for older year groups) – and keep your hands still the rest of the time!

Extra planning and providing of models: More preparation will be needed for a virtual lesson, but the quality of the teaching will reflect this.

Limit teacher talk: If you know you only have a limited amount of time in front of the camera to teach your lesson, plan very carefully what needs teaching via talking, and what can be learnt via other methods. Children and teenagers consistently report that they prefer lessons that include a range of learning methods: "With the best teachers, the lesson revolves around the discussion. They don't speak for hours and hours." (Communication Trust consultation 2009).

Concise, unambiguous instructions: People seem to avoid waffling on video-conferencing calls or videos and are aware of the need to keep to the key information. Giving instructions clearly and concisely, in the order they need to be followed out, greatly helps those with language and communication needs.

Embrace the silence: There are naturally more pauses in video-conferencing calls and learning not to fill the silence will have helped children explain themselves fully and feel listened to. Many children need extra processing time not just to understand language, but also to find the right words, to structure their spoken sentences and their explanations.

How else can the 'new normal' help teachers and families?

Families and school staff may well have been in touch with each other more during this time and parents/carers may feel they've got to know their children's learning better. Use technology to keep this going, whether it's continued use of an app such as 'ClassDojo' or the use of video-conferencing to help parents attend a parent-teacher meeting or a meeting with another professional.

Home learning has changed in format as well as amount! Now there's an understanding that carrying out activities with children, when away from a book or screen, can still be learning – embrace this:

• Set a P.E. lesson or dance class (hello Joe Wicks and Oti Mabuse!) as an activity, requiring pupils to be able to repeat one or two of the moves in school to demonstrate their learning.

• Ask families to tune in to an inspiring speaker online, either 'live' e.g. the 'Guest Speaker sessions' offered by Skype or on YouTube, then think of one question they'd want to ask the person if they could interview them.

• Older pupils could make a video recording with a guest speaker in their family or community (a small business owner, a war veteran, someone with an unusual pet…).

Before video-conferencing was a necessary way to connect with loved ones, many were not keen on using it as they didn't like seeing themselves on screen. If pupils are 'thawing out' to this, use it as an opportunity to use video to self-monitor speaking and listening skills. Similarly, for teacher peer supervision!

So, embrace the positives from our new-found technical knowledge, and continue to use it support your own, and your class', digital and face-to-face communication skills.

Alys is a Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist working within the NHS and for Bubble and Speak, an online and face-to-face Speech and Language Therapy service run by therapists who have been embracing delivering therapy via video-conferencing for over 5 years.

To find out more visit www.bubbleandspeak.com

bubble & speak

The Link CPD

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE

SLCN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN SCHOOLS

- **Do you want** an affordable and practical workforce development solution for your staff?

- **Do you need** staff who are knowledgeable about speech, language and communication development and know how effective SLCN support can be implemented every day in all facets of school life?

- **Do you want** to promote staff engagement and commitment to their roles, improving Individual staff wellbeing, confidence and skills?

- **Do you want** to develop an inclusive environment with increasing understanding of pupils needs and provide effective strategies to support them?

Speech Link Multimedia Ltd is proud to announce the launch of The Link CPD - our new Speech and Language training package for school staff. We have poured our passion and expertise into the development of this innovative new approach to short online courses, with a flexible modular structure to meet the individual needs of learners and their real-life practice.

SO WHAT IS THE LINK CPD?

- A modular approach, allowing participants to build a customised, training pathway which meets their needs.

- Builds on participants' everyday practice using a range of different learning tools to develop practical knowledge and skills for working with children with SLCN, which will be applied back in the classroom.

- Speech and language therapists support your learning and development throughout the course, so that you can achieve the best possible outcomes as learners, and truly apply that learning in your school.

- Suitable for TAs, SENCos, class teachers, and SLTAs working in schools, with specific modules targeted towards certain roles.

Learners can choose the number of modules they wish to complete to craft their own learning. We will be launching the first two of our modules this Autumn: '**Introduction to Speech and Language**' and '**Language Intervention**'.

Future modules will address speech and social communication.

MODULES

INTRODUCTION TO SPEECH AND LANGUAGE

This module will develop learners' understanding of what we mean by 'speech', 'language' and 'communication' and support users to understand the context and impact of SLCN in the classroom. It is suitable for all staff who work with children with SLCN in schools, including SENCOs, class teachers and all support staff.

LANGUAGE INTERVENTION

This module is specifically aimed at participants who will be supporting children with language difficulties in targeted and specialist interventions. You will learn about key strategies for supporting language in the classroom (and around school!) as well as skills for delivering successful language interventions.

HOW THE MODULES WORK

The online platform facilitates a supported flexible learning experience. Participants are able to access the course materials at a convenient time and place, engage in discussion with fellow course members and contact their speech and language therapist tutor.
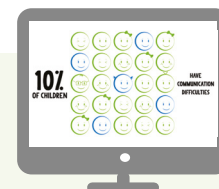
BLENDED LEARNING

Our training model utilises a blended learning approach:

LIVE WEBINARS

Each course will start with a short, introductory live webinar hosted by the course tutor, who will be a qualified speech and language therapist from our team.

CONTENT VIDEOS

Following the webinar, participants will watch content videos, complete interactive activities, and undertake assignments to transfer the skills which they have learnt back into classroom practice.

ONLINE FORUM

Participants will be encouraged to join the online forum for their module to discuss learning points and classroom practice, and share their own observations, ideas, and questions.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE JOURNAL

Learning is recorded in a Reflective Practice Journal and all activities and assignments will be monitored by the course tutor, ensuring personalised feedback is received.

FLEXIBLE LEARNING

The online platform enables participants to access the course when convenient for them, and to work through each lesson and activity at their own pace.

THE BENEFITS TO THE SCHOOL AND PUPILS

One of our goals is to help school staff keep up to date with and to develop their professional skills and knowledge for working with pupils who have SLCN. We want to inspire and support those of you working in schools so that you, in turn, can help the children you work with to reach their best potential in and out of school. We firmly believe, that one of the most important factors for nurturing happy and successful pupils, is to develop a skilled workforce to help them on their journey through school. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) – high quality, relevant, and engaging training – is an investment with far-reaching impact that rewards the whole school community.

To find out more about
The Link CPD, including pricing and to register your interest, go to:

speechandlanguage.info/CPD

MASKED FEELINGS:
SUPPRESSING EMOTIONS TO COPE WITH SCHOOL

By Laura Blackman,
Speech and Language Therapist

Often when a child is feeling sad, angry or anxious there will be a change in behaviour. The child may cry, hit out, withdraw... Something will happen to let you know there is a problem. For some children however, the signs that they are struggling may be minimal; perhaps even completely masked. Children with additional needs, such as ASD and DLD, are at an increased risk of developing social, emotional and mental health problems (SEMH). The very nature of these difficulties means that the way in which they share emotions and ask for support may be different to that of their peers.

STATISTICS:

- 1 in 8 children aged 5-19 have a mental health disorder and 35.6% of these have SEND.

- Approximately 40% of individuals with ASD have symptoms of anxiety (compared with 15% of the general population).

- 81% of children with SEMH needs have significant unidentified language deficits.

Difficulties experienced:

Children may struggle to communicate how they are feeling because they:

- Are unable to label their emotions. You cannot tell someone you are worried if you don't know what that word means or what it feels like in your own body.

- Don't have the language skills to explain how they are feeling. Talking about a situation or event that has upset you requires many skills, including being able to remember and sequence events, construct sentences that are meaningful, and select key information.

- Struggle with the social aspects of communication, such as knowing who you can talk to and when it is the best time to talk to them.

Differences in behaviour at home and school:

A child may appear to be coping at school (e.g. following instructions, joining in with activities) but the child's parents may tell you a completely different story. Their child cries every day before school, 'trashes' their bedroom, because they can't cope with the events of the day, or self-harms. It can be hard to reconcile what you see with what you are being told, but there may be a number of reasons for these differences:

- Behaving appropriately at school can use up all of the child's resources for coping. When they get home they need to let out all the anxieties of the day.
- A child may be worried about the opinions of others. They may suppress behaviours that make them stand out, in order to 'fit in' with their peers.
- Home may be the child's safe space where they can act out and know that their parents will still love them.

Supporting a child when you can't see the problem:

It can be challenging to support a child when you don't know what the problem is. Even the child may not know what is causing their distress. There are however some things you can do:

1) Work collaboratively with parents. Believe what they are saying. Share information and strategies that you both find helpful.
2) Identify things that you can change within the environment to make it easier for the child to cope.
3) Help the child to find different ways of managing their emotions.

Changes to the environment:

- Make the day predictable. Not knowing what is going to happen can increase anxiety, so try to make each day as routine as possible. A schedule or visual timetable can be helpful - refer to it throughout the day so that the child learns what the timetable is for and what the symbols used mean.
- Provide support when transitioning between activities. E.g. let the class know you are about to move onto something new by providing a countdown or visual support, such as a sand timer.
- Consider where the child sits in the classroom. It could be an individual workstation with fewer distractions; sitting near a trusted adult or nearer the door so they can access time out if needed.
- Use clear, simple language when addressing the class. Not understanding what is being said can be very frustrating. Consider tone of voice as well. Many children are sensitive to shouting, even if it is not being directed at them.
- Find out about the child's sensory needs. Coping with sensory challenges, whilst trying to complete work, demands a great deal of effort and can increase anxiety. Work with the child and family to think of ways to minimise these additional stressors.
- Create a culture that is accepting of difference, including different ways of communicating.

Helping the child to cope:

- Make emotions easier to understand by turning them into something concrete, such as colours. E.g. sadness may be 'blue' and excitement could be 'yellow'. Talk about what colour you are feeling throughout the day.
- Use scales, such as numbers or a thermometer, so the child can say what level of stress or anxiety they are experiencing. Try to catch the child before they reach the top of their scale so they can implement calming strategies (e.g. deep breathing, having an agreed time out) before they become overwhelmed.
- Work with the child and family to identify strategies that help with reducing anxiety. Social Stories may be useful in supporting the child to understand and implement these strategies. E.g. "If my anxiety is at a level 3, I can try taking some deep breaths or showing my 'help card' to an adult…"
- Schedule times throughout the day where the child can 'check in' with an identified adult. The adult should initiate talking to the child, as approaching an adult can in itself be difficult.
- Talk to parents about introducing a calming period straight after school.

Finding something that works will likely take some trial and error, as well as lots of patience and persistence. A child may also need specialist support from local mental health services in addition to what you are doing. When you do find something that works, you will likely end up with a child that is happier and better able to cope with life.

About Elm SLT:

Since becoming an SLT 11 years ago, I have been lucky enough to work with children of all ages who have a variety of needs. I am particularly interested in supporting individuals with ASD and Learning Disabilities.

If anyone would like to know more they can visit my website – **www.elmslt.com or e-mail me: laura@elmslt.com.**

From one TA to another

HOW'S IT GOING WITH YOUR NEW CLASS?

By Claire Chambers, Former TA and SLTA for the NHS and Laura Sykes, TA

James' story

Your relationship with your pupils is very special; demanding, exhausting, and, at times frustrating, but ultimately special and will certainly have stood you in good stead in helping your pupils adjust to their new class. You have met enormous challenges in returning to school this academic year, and we really hope things are beginning to settle down.

We are delighted that our guest TA, Laura Sykes has taken the time to share her experience of a young lad (whom we shall call James) who found it very hard to settle in.

JAMES' STORY*

We all know that child who finds it really hard to come through the classroom door in the morning, even after several weeks of being at school, and struggles to establish themselves in a friendship group. This term things may be even more difficult for these children as limited contact with their friends, during lock down, means that relationships will need to be rebuilt with adults and with peers.

I remember a little boy called James who found starting school really challenging. His big sister went to the same school so he was familiar with the school run, the building and the playground; he had been to the local preschool and knew a few of the other children so there was nothing to suggest he wouldn't be able to cope.

When term started, James began displaying aggressive behaviour on the playground and lashing out at children without provocation. Mum was really shocked by James' actions as she reported that he wasn't an aggressive child outside school, "Just a boisterous happy little boy". She said that James had told her that there were "too many people and they were all running everywhere very close to him". It seemed that anxiety had triggered the fight or flight response and, in James' 'case, the default seemed to be fight! He clearly needed coping strategies for the playground and staff tried the usual tactics, sitting him out and talking to him about 'kind hands and feet' and trying to include him in friendship groups; but weeks went by with repeated incidents.

Every day, poor mum would look mortified as we tried to make eye contact with her, signalling that yes, we needed to speak **again** about that day's events. In one of our conversations, she mentioned that, before he had started school,

James had said "I can't go there mummy, I don't know any of their names". We began to wonder whether this had anything to do with his behaviour…

His aggressive actions inevitably brought him to the attention of the TAs and midday staff on duty on the playground, all of whom got to know his name. They began to get to know James and would talk to him or ask him to help with a little job or to hold their hand for a while.

Once James felt that the adults knew him and were looking out for him, he felt safer - the change in his behaviour was remarkable, it was "like flicking a light switch" - James' aggressive behaviour stopped almost overnight!

For some children, the relationships built with school staff cannot be underestimated. If you have an experience that you would like to share on this page, please get in touch at office2@speechlink.co.uk

*names have been changed for this story

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO SLCN

RRP £23.99

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO SLCN

BY SOPHIE MUSTOE-PLAYFAIR & LOUISE BINGHAM

SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPISTS
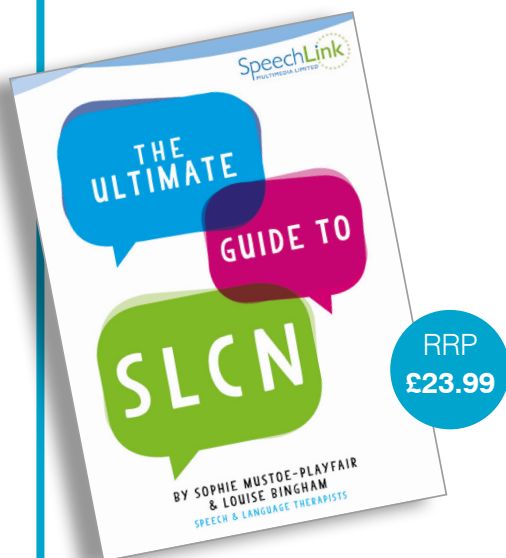
Help to develop the SLCN knowledge base of your workforce for a communication friendly school

Schools are getting increasingly better at considering whether SLCN might be affecting their pupils learning and wellbeing. However, the more staff know, the better off pupils will be, and developing staff knowledge is something that can be improved upon in every school. CPD opportunities and quality, accessible resources for staff will benefit the whole school community.

Speech Link Multimedia Ltd has worked hard to develop an essential resource for all school staff. **'The Ultimate Guide to SLCN'** has been written by qualified speech and language therapists who have extensive experience working in mainstream schools and specialist education settings. We aim to demystify SLCN, and the common childhood conditions which may be related, so that you can better understand the children in your classroom.

This definitive reference eBook offers:

• Guidance for your whole school so that your community can become truly inclusive and communication friendly.

• Practical and specific advice on how to support children in the classroom with regard to the particular diagnoses or needs that they may have.

We believe that supporting children starts with understanding them. This new practical handbook will enable staff to feel confident in unpicking and understanding the needs of the children who they meet.

You can access your **FREE*** copy by completing a Speech Link or Language Link trial.

Go to: speechandlanguage.info/trial

*Terms and conditions apply

LIFE AND DEATH
AFTER LOCKDOWN

By Sarah Helton, Founder of Back Pocket Teacher

For many children, it may take months or even years for them to recover from the emotional impact of the last few months. Schools will have put together a wealth of plans and risk assessments, in order that pupils and staff can return to school as safely as possible, but what is in place to help support children (and members of staff) who have been:

- Dealing with family/friends who have been ill with COVID-19
- Bereaved
- Grieving past deaths
- Struggling with their thoughts and emotions

Unprecedented is a word that has been used countless times over the past months, but it is an accurate term to use. Without time to prepare, we had to react to the situation as it unraveled before us. However, now we need to be prepared to support the emotional impact these past months have had on our children.

Now is the time to be focused on **recovery,** to help children rebuild their lives and help them heal from the difficult experiences.

Tips for teaching staff:

Look after yourself - Kindness to yourself is key to enabling you to help others. Make time for: self-care, connections with your anchors (family, friends, colleagues), leisure activities, relaxation, exercise, and time outdoors. Nourish your body with good food. All will help support your body, mind and emotions.

Ask questions - Find out exactly what life has been like for your children.

Ask parents/carers, has anyone been ill? What has their child found hard about being away from school? What have they really enjoyed?

Allow time for children to talk together in small groups and as a whole class about their experiences. Use a range of resources and techniques to help open these conversations (see activities below)

Keep Talking - Remember to keep talking about the virus. Children may still be worried about getting ill

and fear others around them may die. Be open and honest about what is happening and answer their questions and stick to the facts.

Bereavement

A bereavement during lockdown will have been a very different experience of death as it is unlikely that the child will have been able to visit the person before they died or attend the funeral. Their support network will also have been reduced and there will have been no hugs and comfort from other family or friends. The virus may have heightened their fears that other loved ones are going to die and leave them, and these children will display a stronger reaction to the current crisis.

We need to acknowledge these difficulties for the child and provide routine, reassurance and comfort

Activities to help bereaved and grieving children:

- **Look inside binoculars** - Make a pair of 'binoculars' with two empty kitchen rolls. Use these to 'look inside' to see where we hold different feelings: angry thoughts in the head, somatic pains in the stomach (unexpressed feelings and emotions can lead to physical complaints, symptoms or discomfort such as headaches, stomach pains, lethargy etc.)

- **Emotion body map** - Using a basic outline of the body ask the children to colour/decorate the different parts of their body where they are experiencing feelings.

- **Calm in your palm** - Ask the child to draw around their hand and, for each finger, write/draw a different memory related to a different sense about the person who has died. This idea can also be used when a child is feeling anxious, to help

them feel more grounded and in the moment. Rather than thinking of things related to the person who has died, the child looks to things that are around them at that moment and as they touch each finger they say something like "I see my friends smiling face, I smell lunch cooking, I hear the birds singing" etc.

- **Say their name and share memories** - Encourage the child to talk about their loved one by asking them (in a gentle and supportive manner) questions e.g. "I can see that your favourite colour is red, what was your Dad's favourite colour?"

- **Use artwork** - Divide a large piece of paper into two, on one side ask the children to draw their 'best lockdown day' and on the other side their 'toughest lockdown day'.

Remember there is no timeframe for bereavement. With love and support, bereaved children will successfully navigate the initial difficulties surrounding a death, but their grief will ebb and flow across their lifetime. School staff need to be prepared that key events and transitions often prove to be a time that grief re-emerges - and grieving children will require long term support.

Many teachers are looking to support the difficult return to school with a Recovery Curriculum. Professor Barry Carpenter has written about a Recovery Curriculum and it is, I believe, essential reading for schools. You can read it here https://www.evidenceforlearning.net/recoverycurriculum/ This recovery curriculum has 5 levers.

LEVER 1: Relationships - many of the relationships that were thriving, may need to be invested in and

restored. We need to plan for this to happen, not assume that it will.

LEVER 2: Community - recognise that curriculum has been based in the community for a long period of time. Listen to what has happened in this time, understand the needs of our community and engage them in the transitioning of learning back into school.

LEVER 3: Transparent Curriculum - many of our students will feel like they have lost time in learning and we must show them how we are addressing these gaps, consulting and co-constructing with our students to heal this sense of loss.

LEVER 4: Metacognition - in different environments, students will have been learning in different ways. It is vital that we make the skills for learning in a school environment, explicit to our students, to re-skill and rebuild their confidence as learners.

LEVER 5: Space - to be, to rediscover self, and to find their voice on learning in this issue. It is only natural that we all work at an incredible pace to make sure this group of learners are not disadvantaged against their peers, providing opportunity and exploration alongside the intensity of our expectations.

This type of curricula approach will help **all** of our students.

Let's not rush to looking at the progress data of our children, instead let's focus on recovery.

THROUGH RECOVERY COMES LEARNING AND ONCE RECOVERY HAS TAKEN PLACE GREAT LEARNING CAN FOLLOW.

Sarah Helton - **BackPocketTeacher** www.backpocketteacher.co.uk
Sarah is a SEND Consultant, trainer and author specialising in bereavement, grief and loss.

Further advice and support

Winston's Wish https://www.winstonswish.org/
Child Bereavement UK https://www.childbereavementuk.org/
Anna Freud - National Centre for Children & Families
https://www.annafreud.org/coronavirus-support/support-for-schools-and-colleges/

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS EXPLAINED
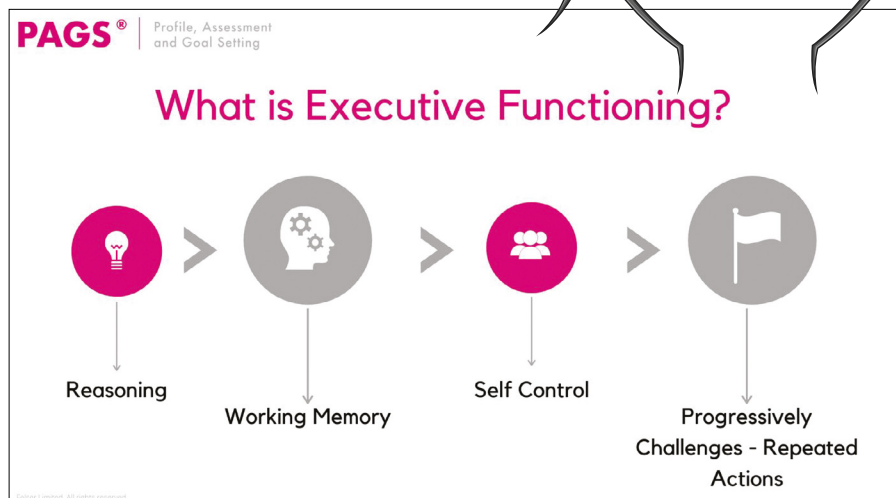
By Feliciea Jibson & Dave Green

An outline of the diagnoses that children with social communication needs can receive, and the solutions that teachers can use to promote successful learning.

There are many statistics that demonstrate how much there is to do in including neurodiverse people into a neurotypical world. One of the most shocking is that 60% of inmates in Young Offenders Institutes in England have a Speech, Language and Communication Need (Research for Ministry of Justice, 2016), mostly undiagnosed. And we know from other research that there is significant comorbidity with other diagnoses. The Kaplan study (2001) noted that 51.6 % of children with dyslexia have another disorder. For ADHD this overlap is 80%. In developmental disorders comorbidity is the rule not the exception.

This is why it is so important for teachers to understand the complex, spiky profile that neurodiverse learners have, and yet also employ simple, clear strategies in classrooms that include everyone in the learning.

The way into this problem is to develop what is called 'executive functioning'. We know that the brains of neurodiverse learners, including those with language and communication difficulties, and dyslexic children, do not process information at the same speed as a neurotypical learner, so we have to practise developing this key area.

For example, at the end of this article, we are going to meet Maggie, who

PAGS® | Profile, Assessment and Goal Setting

What is Executive Functioning?

Reasoning > Working Memory > Self Control > Progressively Challenges - Repeated Actions

is primarily on the Autistic Spectrum, but also has processing difficulties. She is writing about spiders, and works methodically through quite complicated texts, but at a slower rate than some of her peers. In fact, when there is a large block of text on the page, the words often seem to 'swim' and muddle before her eyes, and she has to look away for a while.

We know now what is happening inside her head because neuroscientists have been able to study the functioning brains of willing volunteers whilst they are carrying out key tasks, such as processing text. There isn't one way into the process of executive functioning, it's more about progressively challenging children to improve with repeated practice. This works well when children spend time and effort on activities they love, using executive functioning to build on motivation. Short bursts of physical exercise between learning, such as martial arts and yoga, mindfulness and brain

gym, help build emotional, social, and character development. These are all proven strategies which many teachers have been instinctively building into the curriculum, but are now validated by scientific research.
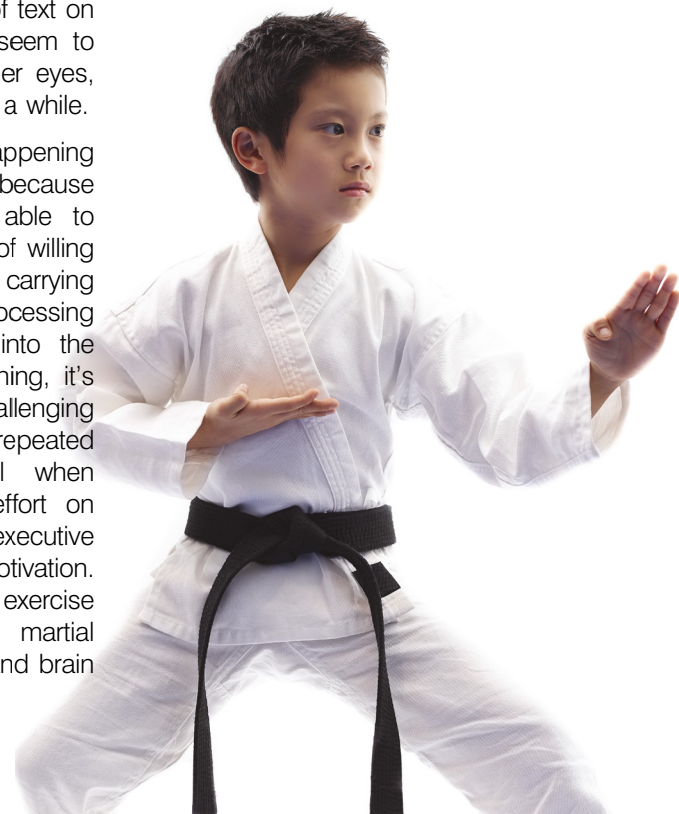
There is also a body of qualitative research data we can learn from. In the last decade, people with autism started to voice their feelings and opinions in fascinating first-hand accounts (Roth, 2010). In Tammet (2012) an extraordinary individual, with ASD, pointed out that communication did not come naturally, 'as nobody asked him to speak'. Flack et al. (2010) point out that in the majority of people, communication and language development is a 'result of exposure' to different experiences.

For Maggie, this means she develops language best when she is visually and kinaesthetically working though activities and tasks that stimulate her processing of information. In short, if she is studying spiders, lots of spider visuals and spider models (maybe even a real spider!) will fire up the narrative text centres in her brain.

We know that for an individual with autism, whether they have speech or not, they may have difficulty in processing and forming language. They may also have difficulty in understanding the meaning of communication (Jordan, 2010) and have very little interest in interacting with other people. Therefore, any approach needs to be step by step – the smaller the steps the better – and using a full range of stimuli.

Lawson's research (2013), highlights that motivation is 'the key to opening paths to learning' for individuals with ASD. She further asserts that motivational activities can increase gamma synchrony (brain wave activity), which broadens the attention span. In short, find out what Maggie enjoys!

So, what all of this research tells us is that we have to start from where the learner is. Any fixed model of development, assessment quartiles, standardised markers or national benchmarks will only tell the learner that they are some way behind their peers. A detailed and thorough assessment of what prior learning, including behaviours and preferences, the learner has acquired, alongside a mapping out of their developmental progress and areas such as self-regulation, will sit comfortably alongside their diagnoses and other indicators of processing and communication delays (for example WIATT II, Digit Span test).

This gives us our starting point: the place from which the journey begins. This is where the creative brilliance of the teacher and teaching assistant comes in. These are the people, after the parents and carers, who know the learner best, who will be able to apply the use of technology, personal interests, passions and hobbies, into a programme of motivational learning.

Let's return to Maggie. She was a real pupil, in my English class and SEND resource. Initially she was struggling to cope in a mainstream setting. This girl, with elements of OCD and Asperger's in her spikey ASD profile, was obsessed with arachnids. More than that, she was an expert. The key to reducing her anxiety and stress related behaviours was to build spiders into her curriculum. You'd be surprised how many times these octo-legged creatures can occur in maths equations! This was the start of her pathway to success, and the look of delight on her face, when presented with a task sheet with spiders crawling all over it, was a testament to the thoroughness of her profiling and mapping, and the willingness of her teachers to personalise her learning.

And this marrying of expertise (based on sound knowledge of the learner) and creativity is the very foundation stone of learner success.

ABOUT FELICIEA JIBSON

Feliciea Jibson is MD at Felser Limited, founder of PAGS (Profile, Assessment and Goal Setting) an online profiling and progress monitoring tool (www.pagsprofile.com). She is a qualified Teacher with years of experience in teaching autistic children in schools, residential settings, and working directly with parents, care givers and families. She has completed her Masters degree in Autism at the University of Birmingham. Before opening Felser Limited in 2018, Feliciea worked for 4 years as a Head of Department for learners of 16 to 25 years old with severe learning difficulties and complex needs.

ABOUT DAVID GREEN

David Green has worked for 30 years in mainstream and special education, specialising in social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and developmental delays. Dave is the Chairman of the Society of Education Consultants, Senior Leader in Education and Affiliated Partner for PAGS.

PAGS® is a digital platform designed to assess and support Neuro-diverse learners. We are currently doing research in the form of an online interview to improve our product PAGS, and better serve the community around Neuro-diverse learners.

If you are interested in participating in this research, sign up at: https://lnkd.in/dvseRVJ

For The Link readers we are offering 2 months free usage of PAGs (normal price £20)

How targeted SLCN interventions from Language Link raise attainment

CONCLUSIONS

The Language Link interventions enabled children to make more progress with their language skills across the year, than children in the control schools.

There were highly significant differences in performance for the experimental group at T1 and T2 compared to the control group, with more progress made across all the standardised assessment measures.

Infant Language Link is an effective wave 1 level SLCN package to help schools close the attainment gap.

Background

Language Link is an assessment and intervention package used by schools throughout the UK to boost language skills as a wave 1 intervention. To assess the impact of Infant Language Link we compared the progress of children from schools supported by the package with those from control schools supported by typical in-school SLCN support.

The study took place in 13 schools across Birmingham and Thurrock (Essex) with wide and varied catchment areas. The schools were allocated to two groups depending on their familiarity with the Language Link interventions. The 6 experimental schools were recruited through the Language Link website. They had all used the package previously for at least 1 year. The 7 control schools were identified either by the local Pupil and School Support Service in Birmingham as schools providing typical support for children with SLCN, or as schools identified through the Language Link website that had previously used the package but not used it for at least 1 year prior to the study.

Participants

Children aged between 4:01 and 5:02 were identified for the study if they scored under the 24th percentile on the Language Link assessment and English was their home language. 32 children from control schools and 36 children from experimental schools fulfilled this criteria.

Method

The experimental schools used the Infant Language Link recommendations and interventions with all of the study pupils for two terms. Schools were recommended to carry out the Reception year listening group first and follow this with up to three themed general language groups. Between 2 and 4 groups were carried out with the pupils. A plan detailing the aims, target vocabulary, resources and detailed instructions for each activity is provided by the Language Link programme.

The control schools provided their typical classroom and intervention support for pupils with language and communication needs. Some children received 1:1 intervention from a teaching assistant if this was recommended by local specialist services, e.g. SaLT, but most of the pupils only received support within the classroom.

All children were assessed at the beginning and end of the study period on a range of recognised speech and language assessments by the research SaLT team.

	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Experimental Schools	22	14	36
Control Schools	20	12	32

This study set out to answer two questions:
1) Would the Language Link interventions make a difference?
2) Would children following Language Link make accelerated progress in comparison to their peers?

Results

The results were overwhelmingly positive. There were significant differences between children from both groups on the standardised assessments with the children in the experimental group making more progress.

ASSESSMENT	EXPERIMENTAL GROUP		CONTROL GROUP	
	T1	**T2**	**T1**	**T2**
Reception Language Link	81.2 (4.16)	100.8 (13.7)	79.3 (5.7)	83.4 (14.9)
CELF - Sentence Structure	6.9 (2.3)	8.9 (1.8)	7.2 (2.0)	8.1 (2.5)
CELF - Word Structure	7.3 (2.6)	9.3 (2.8)	5.8 (3.0)	6.8 (2.8)
CELF - Concepts & Following Directions	5.9 (2.3)	7.7 (2.1)	5.3 (2.8)	7.3 (2.3)
CELF - Recalling Sentences	7.6 (2.0)	8.2 (2.1)	6.9 (2.3)	7.0 (2.7)

Mean (and Standard Deviation) for experimental and control groups before intervention (T1) and after intervention (T2).

There were highly significant differences in performance for the experimental group at T1 and T2 for all the assessments (P>0.0001) apart from Recalling Sentences.

There were no significant differences for the control group on the assessments apart from Concepts and Following Directions subtest (P>0.001).

Did the children who followed Language Link make accelerated progress?

At the beginning of the study 32 children from the experimental schools were identified as needing support and at the end of this study this figure was reduced to just 9 children requiring ongoing support.

Many children in the control schools made progress also. However, there were significant differences between the two groups. At the beginning of the study 36 children were identified in the control schools and at the end of the study 18 continued to require ongoing support.

Here's what the schools thought:

"It's great for early identification of speech and language needs. It takes the guess work away and selects the appropriate intervention for you to support the children with. It's a super weapon to add to your wave 1 assessments, it helps you to identify speech and language needs early and rapidly."

K. Bennet, SENCo, St Dunstan's Primary School

	CONTROL GROUP	EXPERIMENTAL GROUP
Ongoing intervention required (Standard Score < 90)	18 (56.2%)	9 (25%)
No further intervention required (Standard Score > 90)	14 (43.7%)	27 (75%)

Comparison of the percentage of children requiring ongoing support for speech and language needs following the study
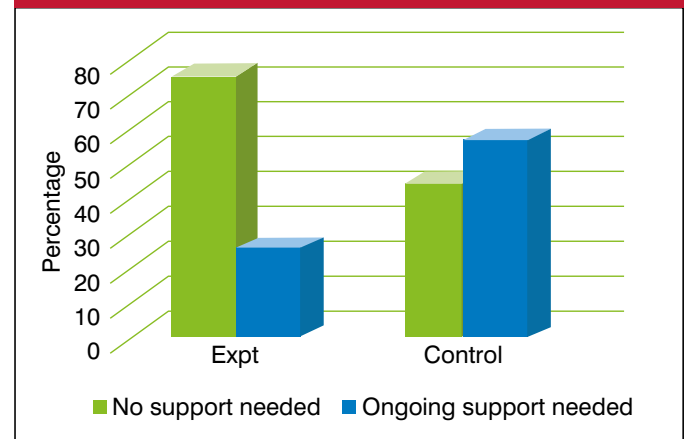
Comparison of the percentage of children in the experimental and control groups needing further language support at T2.

"We have been using Language Link in our school for many years now as the children thoroughly enjoy the activities and we see the progress they make whilst having fun!"

K. Burgess, Langley Primary School

ARE YOU A MEMBER OF
The Link Facebook Group Community?

Our **online community** makes it easy to **stay up-to-date**, seek and share **best practice and advice** for all things **Speech, Language and Communication!**

Join The Link Facebook Group today and let's share knowledge
to support every school, SENCo and speech and language therapist.

Together we can help all children reach their full communication potential.

Join The Link Facebook Group today:

www.facebook.com/groups/thelinksupportingchildrenwithslcn