

FACT SHEET: The importance of developing communication: what the research tells us

Research studies show us that children who struggle to develop communication often struggle with other aspects of their life and schooling. I have summarised below a few of the most pertinent and recent:

The incidence of SLCN in mainstream education

- More children are being integrated into mainstream schools with additional needs. 7% of 5-year olds entering school in 2007 had significant communication difficulties (1)

SLCN and the Criminal Justice System

- 60% of the 7,000 young people who pass through young offender institutions have a communication disability (2) and 46-67% have poor or very poor skills (3)
- In comparison, a separate study showed that there is a high level (91%) of communication disability in young people known to the youth offending team. This is significantly greater than in the general population (10%) (4)
- A survey at Polmont Young Offender's Institution found that 70% of young men had significant communication problems (5)

SLCN and SEBD or challenging behaviour

- Studies show substantial proportions of children with specific language impairment experience social and behavioural problems as they reach secondary school age, and that these problems increase over time (6) as they cannot access the curriculum and becoming increasingly frustrated (7)
- Up to 95% of children with SEBD have been found to have social skills difficulties and 86% have narrative difficulties (8)
- 71% of children with SEBD have some kind of communication difficulty (9)
- Two-thirds of 7 to 14 year olds with severe behaviour problems have communication needs and 40% of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties can unidentified communication difficulties (10)
- Research in Sheffield has shown that children about to be excluded from school showed high levels of speech, language and communication needs and it is argued that a third of children

¹ Bercow J, Beardshaw V and Kerwin-Nye A 'How speech, language and communication are linked to social disadvantage' in Getting in early: primary schools and early intervention, pub The Smith Institute and the Centre for Social Justice November 2008

² Bryan (2004) Speech and language therapy for young people in prison. Submitted to HM Prison Service and quoted in Bercow Report 2008

³ Bryan, K, Freer, J and Furlong, C 'Language and Communication Difficulties in Juvenile Offenders' in International Journal of Communication & Language Disorders vol 42 (2007)

⁴ Brooks V, Report outlining the findings of a 13 month pilot project examining the effectiveness of speech and language therapy for young people known to Exeter, East and Mid Devon Youth Offending Team.

⁵ Polmont Young Offender's Institution, 2003

⁶ Redmond SM, Rice ML. Stability of behavioral ratings of children with specific language impairment. Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research 2002; 45, 190-201

⁷ Tomblin JB, et al. The association of reading disability, behavioural disorders and language impairment among second-grade children. Journal of child psychology and psychiatry 2000; 41:4, 473-482

⁸ Butler C and Kersey G (2012) Language difficulties and behaviour: increasing awareness. Royal College of Speech and Language Therapy Bulletin, 726, 18-19

⁹ Benner G, Nelson J and Epstein M (2002) Language skills for children with SEBD. Journal of Emotional and Behavioural Disorders, 10, 43-59

¹⁰ Cohen N et al (1998) Language, achievement and cognitive processing in psychiatrically disturbed children with previously unidentified and unsuspected language impairments. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 39, 865-977

with speech and language difficulties later develop mental health problems with resulting criminal involvement in some cases (11)

SLCN and mental health

- Up to a third of children with untreated SLCN will develop subsequent mental health issues (12)
- There is evidence that children may be misdiagnosed as having a conduct disorder or mental health problem when in fact they have an undiagnosed SLCN (13)
- Cohen and Lipsett found even very young children with undiagnosed speech, language or communication difficulties were perceived as being more delinquent/ difficult by their mothers than a matched control group (14)

SLCN and quality of life

- Social competence contributes to our quality of life, as our lives are built on positive interactions and relationships with the people around us and children with poor social communication skills struggle to form relationships and therefore experience a poorer quality of life (15)
- The 3 key protective factors that increase the likelihood of positive life outcomes: Language, literacy and numeracy; parental support; and social and emotional competence (16)
- Social competence has been repeatedly demonstrated to be a critical variable in predicting success in future life (17)
- People with social skills difficulties are often not able to make friends as they are perceived as rude, awkward, shy, stand-offish, aggressive or inept and 'are often rejected by their peers' and because of this, they struggle to make and maintain friendships (18).
- Social competence has been repeatedly demonstrated to be a critical variable in predicting success in future life (19) – the people who get jobs and then get promoted are the people with good social skills.
- 80% of people who fail at work do so for one reason: they do not relate well to other people (20).
- Research has demonstrated powerful connections between how well a child does socially and how successful they are in other areas of their life (21).

¹¹ Clegg J, Hoiis C, Rutter M. Life Sentence. RCSLT Bulletin 1999; 571, 16-18.

¹² Clegg J, Hoiis C, Rutter M. Life Sentence. RCSLT Bulletin 1999; 571, 16-18.

¹³ Lanz, R. Speech and language therapy within the Milton Keynes YOT, a four-month project. 2009

¹⁴ Cohen N, Lipsett L. Recognized and unrecognized language impairment in psychologically disturbed children. Child symptomatology maternal depression and child dysfunction. Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science 1991; 23, 376-389.

¹⁵ Crawford K and Goldstein H (2005) Supporting Social Skill Development in Students with Emotional/Behavioural Disorders. Impact, 18 (2)

¹⁶ Gross J (2008) 'Why we need to target four to eight year olds' Chapter 1 in the report Getting in early: primary schools and early intervention (Edited by J Gross) The Smith Institute and the Centre for Social Justice

¹⁷ Denham S, Mason T, Caverly S, Schmidt M, Hackney R, Caswell C and Demulder E (2001) Preschoolers at play: Co-socialisers of emotional and social competence. International Journal of Behavioral Development, 4, 290-301

¹⁸ Warnes E, Sheridan S, Geske J and Warnes W (2005) A contextual approach to the assessment of social skills: identifying meaningful behaviors for social competence, Psychology in the Schools 42:2 pp173-187

¹⁹ Denham S, Mason T, Caverly S, Schmidt M, Hackney R, Caswell C and Demulder E (2001) Preschoolers at play: Co-socialisers of emotional and social competence. International Journal of Behavioral Development, 4, 290-301

²⁰ Bolton R, People skills: how to assert yourself, listen to others and resolve conflicts Simon & Schuster 1979

²¹ Rubin K, the friendship factor: helping our children to navigate their social world and why it matters for their success and happiness Penguin books 2002