Understanding the link between language, communication and SEMH.

Louise Culshaw (SEND Advisory Teacher)

Louise.Culshaw@devon.gov.uk

Aims of the session

- To recognise the link between language and communication needs and SEMH presentation.

- To consider which language and communication skills are particularly relevant to SEMH.

- To understand the concept of 'double disadvantage'. Identifying pupils who may be particularly at risk of both SEMH and language and communication needs.

- To know some assessment tools and strategies that can be used to support pupils.

Devon
County Council

What do we know?

- At least 81% of pupils who present with SEMH have unidentified language needs (Hollo et al, 2014).

- Pupils with language and communication needs are much more likely to experience mental health difficulties.

- Language and communication needs present a barrier to accessing support.

Devon County Council

Key areas of language and communication

Area of language:	What does this involve?	What we see:
Understanding language	Vocabulary – knowledge of word meanings and how to use them. Following instructions – understanding what you have been asked to do and in what order.	Struggle to understand language related to behaviour e.g. not understanding expectations or complex terminology (e.g. sanction, disrespectful). Refusal to complete tasks. Doesn't follow instructions. Misinterprets situations.
Emotional literacy	Labelling of own feelings and those of others. Managing emotions with words – e.g. distracting, thinking about the cause of unpleasant feelings and calming ourselves.	Impulsive 'don't think before they act'. Unable to tell others how they are feeling. Difficulties self-reflecting – unable to see how their actions have impacted others.
Inferencing and verbal reasoning	'Reading between the lines' – working out what has not been explicitly stated. Verbalising your own thinking e.g. predicting, comparing, explaining.	Misses the 'bigger picture'. Literal thinking. Doesn't pick up on cues e.g. change in facial expression or tone of voice. Socially isolated. Unable to provide an explanation or the justify why they have done something.
Narrative	Being able to describe key events, including our own life story and fiction. Able to describe key events in a sequence. Appreciate the listeners' knowledge and perspective.	Struggles to engage in restorative conversations. Can appear to show a lack of empathy and remorse. Can't describe accurately what has happened – may appear to lie or blame others. Re-telling of incidents may be jumbled and incoherent.
Social problem solving	Understanding how to interact with others appropriately and being able to use language to resolve issues. Able to persuade, negotiate, repair situations as they start to break-down. Appreciating others' points of view.	Need a high level of adult support to 'navigate' social interactions. Conflict and fall-outs with peers. May respond physically, rather than verbally. Socially isolated.

Devon
County Council

Double Disadvantage

- Strong correlation between the two areas.

- Complex interplay between the two areas – too simplistic to say that one need causes the other.

- Pupils who present with needs in both areas are at a 'double disadvantage' in relation to appropriate assessment and provision.

- For example, to become good communicators, pupils need opportunities for social interactions – these opportunities could be impacted because of language and communication needs or due to SEMH.

Devon
County Council

Assessment

- Can be formal or informal
- If unable to assess – assume language and communication needs.
- SLCN/SEMH GRT.
- C&I Team webinars.

Support & Provision

- Identify language needs – build a profile.

- Encourage staff to be curious – what language and communication needs may be underpinning this behaviour?

- Use 'language-friendly' approaches at all times.

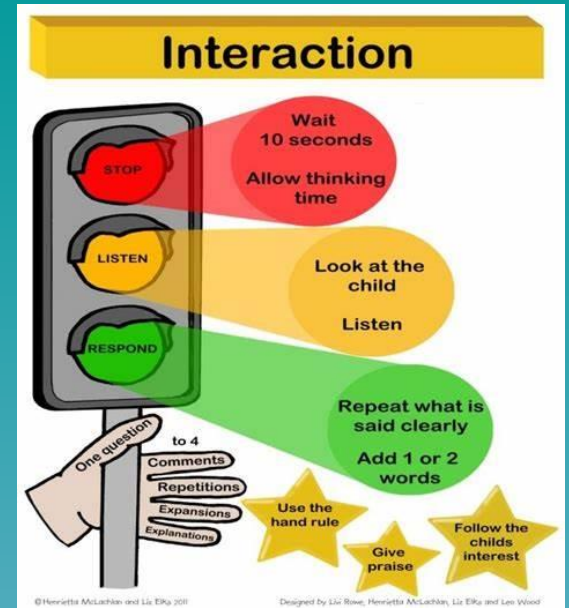- Focus on interventions which build connections....once these relationships are established, more complex language skills can be targeted.

Devon
County Council

Adaptations to reduce the barrier

- Adult use of language
- Visual supports
- Task lists – manageable chunks
- 4 comments to every 1 question

Ideas and activities

- Activities which develop both language and communication, whilst building relationships with adults.
- To 'think, know, remember' – reflect on shared experiences.
- Understand different perspectives.
- Allow others to take control.

SIMON SAYS GAME

shutterstock.com · 450735610

Devon
County Council
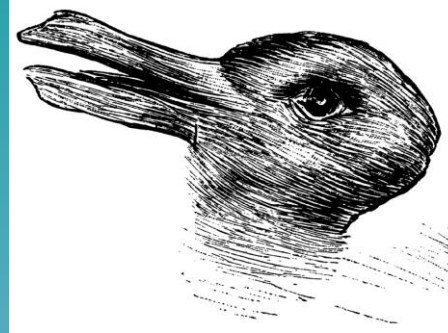
Key take-aways

- Assume language and communication needs until proven otherwise.
- Prioritise pupils with SEMH for language screening.
- All staff working with a pupil need to be aware of that individual's language profile.

Devon
County Council