

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.

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.

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.

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.

Assessment

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

Universally Speaking
The ages and stages of children's communication development
From 5 to 11 years

The Communication Trust
They talk we listen

Language Builders for 3-5s

Communication Builders for Complex Needs

Henrietta McLachlan and Liz Elks
Speech and Language Therapists

Illustrated by Livi Rowe

Checklist
For ages 5-11

Use this checklist if there is a child in your care who you think may have speech, language and communication needs. Read each statement and then tick the 'R' (red) column if the child strongly matches the statement, 'A' (amber) column if they occasionally match the statement and 'G' (green) if they do not match the statement.

Talking difficulties - what you might see and hear	A	G	Listening difficulties - what you might see and hear	A	G	Difficulties taking part - what you might see and hear	A	G
1. Do they have a limited vocabulary? Do they... a. Use less words than other children their age b. Over-use general words - "thing", "that", "put", "get" c. Use the wrong words for things - "board" instead of "wheel", or "ride" up their own words like "butterflies" (downward) d. Use lots of filler or hesitates a lot - "um", "er", "y'know..."			1. Do they find it difficult to listen or understand? Do they... a. Forget or not engage with tasks b. Struggle to follow long or complex sentences c. Watch other children so they can work out what to do or see the task to follow instructions d. Concentrate on non-verbal tasks for much longer than verbal ones			1. Do they find it hard to understand the rules of conversation? Do they... a. Avoid eye contact or stare at people when they are talking b. Struggle to take turns, interrupt too much, take over conversations or struggle to get involved c. Misunderstand other people's feelings and facial expressions		
2. What are their sentences like? Do they... a. Miss out the small words in sentences that carry less meaning - "TV", "two", "bicycle", "two" b. Miss off the endings of words - "ing", "ed", "y" c. Sound muddled or disorganised when talking in longer sentences d. Repeat and re-use words in a way that makes them difficult to follow			2. Can they understand questions? Do they... a. Answer with an irrelevant comment b. Repeat part of the question c. Answer a slightly different related question d. Not respond			2. Do they struggle to talk and listen with other children? Do they... a. Have difficulties joining in with group conversations, games and activities b. Fail to notice what others are saying or fail to pick-up clues about how they are feeling c. Take over, get things wrong, or disrupt games d. Have situations when other children do not want to play or partner with them		
3. Is their speech unclear? Do they... a. Miss out sounds from the beginning, middle or end of words, or use only a limited range of different speech sounds in their talking b. Substitute one sound for another - "a" for "b" or "l" for "r" c. Do they have a stammer or stutter? Do they... a. Pause or repeat some sounds or words, e.g. "a... a... a..." or "b... b... b..." or get stuck on a sound and no sound comes out b. Try to have their attention by making sounds in certain situations, or change what they were going to say mid-sentence to make a word they find difficult			3. Does new or less frequently used vocabulary take a long time to learn? a. Do they struggle to recognise the difference between sounds in words? Do they... b. Struggle to count out syllables in words c. Struggle to match sounds and letters d. Do they have literacy difficulties? Do they... a. Have difficulty understanding what they've read and making inferences b. Do they have behavioural difficulties? Do they... c. Have disruptive behavior or do they withdraw from activities/conversations			3. Do they take things literally? Do they... a. Struggle to understand jokes, idioms, sarcasm or metaphor		
4. Do they have literacy difficulties? Do they... a. Struggle with organising text in written work, with words mixed up, and lots of grammar errors you wouldn't expect for their age b. Do they have spelling difficulties? Do they... a. Make the self-corrections, when withdrawn, do not initiate speaking in class, or become frustrated b. Do they have social interaction difficulties? Do they... a. Other children find it difficult to understand them or probably tease them about their talking			4. Do they have social interaction difficulties? Do they... a. Have difficulties making friends or joining in with group activities			On completing the checklist, if a child rates amber or red, this may be a cause for concern, so in the first instance you may find it useful to refer back to the Universally Speaking booklet to check their development in more detail and talk to their parents about your concerns. Universally Speaking may also be useful in supporting you to monitor progress, where children have many red and amber ratings, this will be important to consider further assessment, so discussing this with your SLCN and the child's parents will be an important next step.		

Universally Speaking Age 5-11

The Communication Trust
PEARSON

Visit www.thecommskills.org.uk for more information or use the more detailed checklist in the publication Don't Get Me Wrong available at www.thecommskills.org.uk/publications/dont-get-me-wrong

Eiklan TALC
Test of Abstract Language Comprehension

Devoted by
Liz Elks and Henrietta McLachlan
Speech and Language Therapists

Based on
The Language of Learning
By Blank, Rose and Serin, 1978

Illustrated by
Livi Rowe







SECONDARY
Language Link

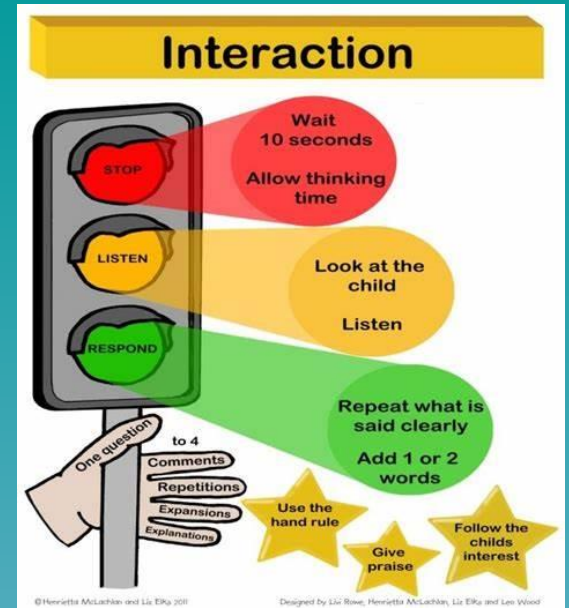
Support & Provision

- 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.

Adaptations to reduce the barrier

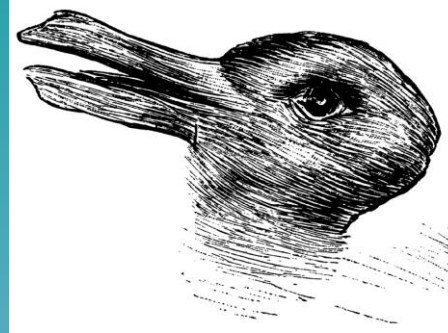
- Adult use of language
- Visual supports
- Task lists – manageable chunks
- 4 comments to every 1 question

Arrival at school		
1		Take off coat <small>(scarf, mittens, boots and hat)</small>
2		Open Backpack
3		Take out work
4		Take out lunch
5		Hang up coat
6		Hang up backpack



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.



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.