



The Communication Trust  
Every child understood

# Universally Speaking

The ages and stages of children's  
communication development

From 5 to 11 years





**The Communication Trust**  
Every child understood

### **The Communication Trust**

The Communication Trust is a coalition of 50 voluntary and community organisations with expertise in speech, language and communication. We harness our collective expertise to enable the children's workforce and commissioners to support all children and young people's communication skills, particularly those with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

We do this by raising awareness, providing information and workforce development opportunities, influencing policy, promoting best practice among the children's workforce and commissioning work from our members.

The Trust was founded in 2007 by Afasic, BT, Council for Disabled Children and I CAN.

**[www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk)**

**PEARSON**

### **Pearson Assessment**

This booklet, along with the rest of the suite of the Universally Speaking booklets, was originally produced with the support of Pearson Assessment. They are publishers of standardised assessments for a range of speech, language and communication needs.

**[www.pearsonclinical.co.uk](http://www.pearsonclinical.co.uk)**

Universally Speaking is a series of 3 booklets for anyone who works with children and young people. To order further copies of the Universally Speaking booklets please go to

**[www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/universallyspeaking](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/universallyspeaking)**

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# Children can all be great communicators

When developing language, most children go through the same stages; some will be quicker, others a little slower.

Universally Speaking provides information that will help you to support children to develop skills in line with their age as well as help you to identify and support children who may be struggling.

Children's speech, language and communication is 'everybody's business'. Parents and staff who see and work with children regularly are often the experts in knowing about a child's communication. With the right information and access to the right help at the right time early on, everyone can really make a difference.

Check out the information in this booklet to find out whether the children you work with are on the right track. Also, find out what helps them learn how to listen, talk and communicate as well as what to do if you have concerns about any of the children you work with.

Use the '**Children should be able to...**' sections to learn about typical development

Use the '**How to check it out...**' sections to think about the children you know

Use the '**Top 4 things to do**' to support speaking and listening in school

Use the pullout '**Checklist**' for particular children you're concerned about

See page 24 for information on children with English as an Additional Language.

## Special Education Needs and Disability

Identifying needs and making effective provision for children and young people with SEND is an important part of the 2014 SEND Code of Practice<sup>1</sup> with recognised benefits. Universally Speaking sets out expected progress in speech, language and communication and so can help practitioners begin to identify where children and young people may be struggling. It can also help practitioners to gather useful information which would support further assessment of needs and inform initial planning for support.

<sup>1</sup> Department of Education, Department for Health (2015). Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years - Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities.

# 5 top reasons to understand more about communication

1

## **Language is the vehicle for learning**

It enables understanding and expression of thought, it supports thinking, problem solving and reasoning and it's accepted as being critical to cognitive development.<sup>2</sup> Being able to talk and listen well is important in school – to learn, make friends and feel confident. Poor language puts children at risk of poor reading and writing, poor behaviour and poor attainment.

2

## **Language development doesn't happen by accident**

Children need adults to support their language and communication development and the more we know and understand about language and how it develops, the better position we're in to help.

3

## **Supporting communication development is easy when you know how**

It doesn't take lots of thought or planning. Communication is everywhere, so can be supported in all activities by making slight changes to current good practice to make it even better.

4

## **To increase your own confidence**

Many practitioners report that they're not confident in knowing what children should be doing at different ages and stages, or how to support good language skills and spot those children who might be struggling – the information in this booklet will help.

5

## **About 1 million children in the UK have long term, persistent difficulties**

Additionally, in areas of social deprivation, more than 50% of children start school with delayed language.<sup>3</sup> These children need to be identified early and get access to the right kind of intervention to minimise the impact of poor language and communication skills.

<sup>2</sup> Goswami, U. and Bryant, P. (2007) Children's Cognitive Development and Learning (Primary Review Research Survey 2/1a), Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education

<sup>3</sup> Locke, A., Ginsborg, J., and Peers, I., (2002) Development and Disadvantage: Implications for Early Years IJLCD Vol 27 No 1

# By age 5...

## Attention, listening and understanding

Attention and listening skills are the foundation of language. Without well developed skills in this area, children will struggle to understand and respond appropriately.

In addition, children may have difficulties understanding language being spoken to them. If you look carefully, you can often see these children struggling to listen and follow instructions. They often copy other children who have understood what to do.

## Vocabulary

Vocabulary is key for learning.

Amazingly, research tells us that the level of children's vocabulary at age 5 is a very strong predictor of the qualifications achieved at school leaving age and beyond.<sup>4</sup>

This section is about understanding language as well as saying words.

<sup>4</sup> Feinstein, L., and Duckworth, K. (2006) Development in the early years: its importance for school performance and adult outcomes. London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Institute of Education, University of London.

## Children at 5 should be able to...

- Understand they need to look at who's talking to them and think about what they're saying
- Listen to and understand instructions about what they're doing, whilst busy with another task
- Understand longer 2 to 3 part spoken instructions, E.g. *"Get your coat, then choose a partner and line up by the door"*
- Understand 'how' or 'why' questions, E.g. *"How did the family escape from the bear in the story?"*

## Children at 5 should be able to...

- Understand that words can be put into groups or categories, and give examples from each category, E.g. Animals, transport, food, etc
- Understand a range of words to describe the idea of time, shape, texture, size and know in which context to use them, E.g. Soon, early and late; square, triangle and circle; soft, hard, and smooth; big, tiny and tall
- Name objects, characters and animals from a description, E.g. *"It lives in the jungle and is fierce with big teeth and is stripy."* Children at this age will ask if they are unsure
- Use words more specifically to make their meaning clear, E.g. *"I didn't want my yellow gloves, I wanted the spotty ones that match my hat"*



## Speech sounds

It's normal for children at 5 to still struggle with some sounds, especially 'r' and 'th'. There are lots of reception age children with 'wabbits' and 'fums'.

Combinations of consonant sounds at the beginnings and ends of words can be tricky, E.g. *pider for spider, fower for flower*

Words with 3 or more syllables can be difficult, E.g. *paske tti for spaghetti, efalent for elephant*

## Sentence building and grammar

By age 5 children will be using longer and more complicated sentences.

English is a complicated language though, so they'll still make mistakes, usually over-generalising rules of grammar, E.g. They may say 'fighted' instead of 'fought' or 'gooses' instead of 'geese', 'sheeps' instead of 'sheep'

## Children at 5 should be able to...

- Produce speech that is clear and easy to understand, though may still have some immaturities
- Develop good knowledge and understanding of sounds and words, which are important for reading and spelling
- Break words up into syllables, E.g. "*Fri..day*" – 2 syllables, "*Sat...ur..day*" – 3 syllables
- Recognise words that rhyme or sound similar, E.g. "*Cat and hat – they rhyme*", "*Bananas and pyjamas – they sound similar*"
- Work out what sound comes at the beginning of a word, E.g. "*Sit begins with 's'. Sun, silly, Sam and sausage all begin with 's'.*"

## Children at 5 should be able to...

- Use well formed sentences, longer sentences and sentences with more details, E.g. "*I made a big round pizza with tomato, cheese and ham on top*"
- Use some irregular past tense words, E.g. "*I drank all my milk*", "*She took my teddy*"
- Join phrases with words such as 'if', 'because', 'so', 'could', E.g. "*I can have a biscuit if I eat all my dinner*"
- Ask and answer 'what', 'where', 'when', and 'what could we do next' questions
- Show that they can use language to reason and persuade, E.g. "*Can I go outside because it's stopped raining?*"

# By age 5...



## Storytelling and narrative

We tell each other stories all the time, it's one of the ways we communicate and share our experiences.

The key for making good stories is to have a good structure.

Children need to know what important elements are necessary to tell a story and how to structure these in order to tell a story that makes sense.

## Children at 5 should be able to...

- List events with some detail, E.g. *"We went to the seaside and I made the biggest sandcastle ever and we ate fish and chips on newspaper"*
- Re-tell favourite stories - some parts as exact repetition and some in their own words, E.g. *"...going on a bear hunt, going to catch a big one, we're not scared...and he chased them all the way home"*
- Begin to add something that's gone wrong in their own stories, E.g. *"...but the little boy dropped his big ice cream on the floor and he was very sad and crying..."*
- Describe events. These may not always be joined together or in the right order, E.g. *"Daddy was cross. We was late for the football. It was broken. The car tyre"*
- Use longer and more complicated sentences within their stories, E.g. *"When he got home he saw an enormous crocodile sitting on the sofa and the crocodile said good morning, because he was a friendly crocodile"*

## Conversations and social interaction

Conversations are key for social interaction and also for supporting learning and thinking.

These are skills like any others and with practice children will improve and use these skills to develop friendships and support learning.

## Children at 5 should be able to...

- Start conversations with other people and join in with group conversations
- Join in and organise role play with friends
- Play co-operatively and pretend to be someone else talking. These games can be quite elaborate and detailed
- Use language to communicate a wider range of things – such as ask, negotiate, give opinions and discuss ideas and feelings, E.g. *"Can we go to the park after school today – it's a lovely sunny day and it will be fun"*
- Give details that they know are important and will influence the listener, E.g. *"Ahmed fell over that stone, Javid didn't push him"*



# How to check it out

By age 5...

## Check out how children can talk

**Listen out for children's language. Watch out for those who struggle**

- Ask them to summarise a recent task or event using 'who', 'where', 'when', 'what happened' and 'what could we do next' questions – have some children ask the questions and the others answer.
- Play this quick carpet time game: *How many animals can you think of in 20 seconds?* Children should have no problem listing things that belong to familiar categories.
- Does a child regularly sound muddled or disorganised when talking? Do they regularly forget words or miss out important pieces of information? If so, they may be struggling.

## Check out how children can listen

**Check out children's listening and understanding. Watch out for those who watch others carefully or look lost or confused**

- Can children understand longer 2 to 3 part spoken instructions? E.g. *"Choose a pencil in a colour you like, then draw round your hand really carefully onto the big yellow paper."*
- Can they listen carefully to a question and focus on the key information needed in the answer? E.g. *"Why didn't the little red hen want to share her bread at the end of the story?"*

## Check out how children can take part

**Watch out for social interaction skills. Watch out for children who seem isolated or struggle to join in**

- Do they use language to ask, negotiate, give opinions and discuss ideas and feelings? E.g. *"If we finish our work quietly, will we have golden time after break?"*
- Talk to children about what they enjoyed most that day – these conversations often include different games or activities they enjoyed playing with friends

## Top 4 suggestions to support development of speaking and listening

1. Teach children how to listen – encourage them to identify good listening skills in themselves.
2. Use good practice strategies to teach new vocabulary – link new words to those children already know. Ask the children if they have heard of the word before, help them fill in gaps of understanding and play around with how the word looks and feels. Perhaps set up a word wall in class.
3. Give explicit structures for supporting narrative skills – stories should have who, where, when, what happened and an ending. Encourage an ethos of asking for clarification, saying when they don't understand and what they're struggling with.
4. Give plenty of time for children to think and respond to questions.

If you're worried about a child in your care there's more information at [www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk)  
You should also talk to the child's parents about your concerns.

# By age 7...



## Attention, listening and understanding

Children become much more able to be selective about what they need to listen to and are able to integrate listening with other tasks.

### Children at 7 should be able to...

- Understand the key points they need to focus on in order to answer a question or follow an instruction and begin to ignore less important information, E.g. *“Four buses have nine passengers each but two trains are empty. How many passengers all together?”*
- Be aware of when a message is not clear and ask for an explanation, E.g. *“Is the author the one that writes the story and the illustrator does the pictures?”*
- Understands complex 2 to 3 part instructions, E.g. *“Choose a character from the story we’ve just read, then talk to your partner about how they feel at the end of the story”*

## Vocabulary

Children are learning new vocabulary all the time - words they need for general learning and topic-specific vocabulary.

Understanding how words can be linked by what they mean as well as how they sound and look, can really help children remember new vocabulary.

### Children at 7 should be able to...

- Compare words - the way they look, sound or mean, E.g. *“It’s weird, bare and bear sound the same, but you spell them different and they mean different things”*
- ‘Guess the word’ when provided with clues using shape, size and function, E.g. *“It’s a wild animal, grey and quite fat with thick skin, it isn’t an elephant, it has a long name and starts with ‘h’”*
- Use newly learnt words in a specific and appropriate way, E.g. *“Do you know what symmetry means? If you draw a line down a shape and it’s exactly the same on each side of the line, then it’s symmetrical”*





### Speech sounds

There might be occasional errors with some longer words and with words with 2 or 3 consonants together at the beginning or the end of the word, E.g. **scramble**.

#### Children at 7 should be able to...

- Use speech that is consistently clear and easy to understand
- Show good knowledge and understanding of sounds and words, which are important for reading and spelling, E.g. Can identify beginning and end sounds in words
- Spot more complex rhymes, E.g. Happy/snappy
- Split up short words into sounds, E.g. D-i-nn-er
- Count syllables in words, E.g. Ca-ter-pill-ar: 4 syllables
- Use sound and letter links to read and spell unfamiliar words

### Sentence building and grammar

Grammar is still developing and becoming more complex. Children make fewer errors, though there are still some.

#### Children at 7 should be able to...

- Ask lots of questions to find out specific information including 'how' and 'why', E.g. "How do we know burglars can't get in?"
- Use an imaginative range of descriptive words in sentences, E.g. "Suddenly, he saw a huge hairy creature"
- Use more complicated grammar including using different ways to join phrases to help explain or justify an event, E.g. "It was scary because even the man with the dog looked worried, so we decided to get out of there"

**By age 7...**

# By age 7...

## Storytelling and narrative

Children's stories about their life and experiences are making more sense, they have more detail and are usually told with words and events in the right order.

### Children at 7 should be able to...

- Tell a story with important key components in place – so they set the scene, have a basic story plot and the sequence of events are generally in the right order
- Describe their own experiences in detail and in the right order, E.g. About a holiday, weekend activities or visits
- Begin to be aware of what the listener knows already and make checks while telling a story, E.g. *"You know Mr Jones, he's our caretaker, he always wears a hat, well he wasn't in school today..."*
- Accurately predict what will happen in a story

## Conversations and social interaction

Children are now more grown up in their social interactions. They'll now talk about things that aren't directly linked to themselves or that they aren't that interested in. They can usually keep to a topic in a conversation and can be easily prompted to move on if they're taking over or talking too much.

### Children at 7 should be able to...

- Take turns to talk, listen, and respond in two way conversations and groups
- Use language they hear other people using and begin to be aware of current peer language. They're learning that they need to use different styles of talk with different people. They will use different words when they are talking to friends than when they are talking to a teacher, E.g. *Terms like, 'in your face', 'wicked' or 'yeah right'*
- Exaggerate in an implausible way, to make stories more exciting, E.g. *"Last year on my summer holidays I made the biggest sandcastle in the world"*



# How to check it out

By age 7...

## Check out how children can talk

**Listen out for children's language. Watch out for those who struggle**

- Are children able to understand and learn topic vocabulary? Have a display with topic vocabulary – get children to choose one of the words and encourage them to say it on its own and in a sentence of at least 6 words. Does it make sense? Have they understood the word?
- Can they use more complicated language to justify or explain? Think of a story they'll know, which has a familiar character in it and encourage the children to say whether the character is good or bad. Then get them to justify why they think that. You can add counter arguments to get them thinking, E.g. *"We know the big bad wolf is bad because he eats grandma, but maybe he's just hungry?"*

## Check out how children can listen

**Check out children's listening and understanding. Watch out for those who take a long time to respond or who are very quiet and watch other children to work out what to do**

- Can children understand more complex 2 to 3 part spoken instructions? E.g. *"In your groups, choose one of the famous people in history we have talked about and decide between you the top 5 reasons they were good or not so good."*
- Do they ask lots of questions to find out specific information? Including 'how' and 'why' and respond appropriately to the answers?

## Check out how children can take part

**Watch out for social interaction skills**

- Do you see them taking turns in groups and with other children to talk, listen and be part of a conversation? Are there any children who seem isolated, who do not join in with other children?
- Have you noticed children being more aware of the need to talk differently to adults and peers? Have you noticed any different phrases being used? Are there children who seem unaware of this?

## Top 4 suggestions to support development of speaking and listening

1. Play word games, E.g. Have children think up different words for the same thing, talk about word opposites, add adjectives to describe an object, or add adverbs to describe an action.
2. Encourage longer sentences to explain; have a box full of connectives, E.g. also, then, next, because, however. Use one of them to explain your science experiment.
3. Give children specific roles for group work, E.g. encourager, questioner, timekeeper, leader, observer – show them what to do and practice what to say. This will facilitate group working and discussions.
4. Encourage an ethos of asking for clarification, saying when they don't understand and what they're struggling with.

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# By age 9...



## Attention, listening and understanding

Understanding skills are becoming more sophisticated. Children understand inferred meaning as well as information that is explicitly presented.

### Children at 9 should be able to...

- Listen to information, work out which elements are key and make relevant, related comments, E.g. *“So, we need to go home and ask people of different ages what telly was like when they were young and work out how things have changed. I can ask my granny, my dad and my big sister”*
- Identify clearly when they haven’t understood and be specific about what additional information they need, E.g. *“So what do we use to measure liquid again? Is it millimetres or millilitres?”*
- Infer meanings, reasons and make predictions, E.g. *“Now, class 4, I’m going to count to 10” [Mrs Jones is getting cross, if we don’t stop messing around, someone will end up having to go and see the head teacher]*

## Vocabulary

Vocabulary continues to grow – not only with words related specifically to topics, but also general vocabulary needed for thinking and learning.

### Children at 9 should be able to...

- Use a range of words related to time and measurement, E.g. *“Next Friday we’re going on our school trip. Mrs Malaki says we’ll be about an hour on the coach – that’s not too bad is it mum?”*
- Use a wide range of verbs to express their thoughts, or explain cause and effect, E.g. *“I think that’s a great idea”, or “If you hold the bowl still, I’ll be able to pour the mixture in”*
- Join in discussions about a visit or activity using topic vocabulary, E.g. *“Tutankhamen was about the same age as me when he became a pharaoh. He was buried in the valley of the kings with loads of treasure. Do you believe the mummy’s curse?”*

## Sentence building and grammar

Children speak clearly, fluently and accurately about past, present and future events.

Grammar is complex and can be used for different purposes.

### Children at 9 should be able to...

- Use a whole range of regular and irregular grammatical word endings, with few errors being made, E.g. fought, fell, brought, geese, fish
- Use complex grammar and sentences effectively to communicate in different ways to clarify, summarise, explain choices and plan, E.g. *“We decided that Jenny would go first because she’s the fastest and would get us a good start. Me and Jack will go in the middle and Waleed will go at the end because he does loads of sport and is really fit”*
- Uses intonation linked to grammar to help make sense of information, E.g. *“Helpful?”*, *she cried*, *“you must be joking!”*

## Storytelling and narrative

Children tell stories that have a good structure with a distinct plot. They usually include an exciting event with a clear resolution and end point. This is reflected in their writing.

### Children at 9 should be able to...

- Put interest into their voices to make storytelling exciting and come to life
- Add detail or leave information out according to how much is already known by the listener
- Understand the interests of the listener, E.g. *“Guess who I saw yesterday...”*



By age 9...

# By age 9...

## Conversations and social interaction

Children understand conversation rules – when to talk and when to listen. They also understand when people may need more or fewer details, depending on the situation.

## Children at 9 should be able to...

- Use formal language when appropriate in some familiar situations, E.g. Showing a visitor around school
- Keep conversations going with a range of people in different situations, by making relevant comments or by asking questions
- Use language for a range of different reasons. This is important for building friendships, E.g. Complimenting or criticising, clarifying and negotiating





# How to check it out

By age 9...

## Check out how children can talk

**Listen out for children's language. Watch out for those who struggle**

- Can they use complex grammar and sentences effectively to plan, summarise and explain choices? Ask the children to plan a party for a group of 3 year olds – encourage them to think of where it might be, what children might do and eat. Get them to summarise their plans and explain why they've made decisions around games, food and the venue.
- Can they discuss visits or activities including topic vocabulary? Give children group roles to discuss a visit or topic.

## Check out how children can listen

**Check out children's listening and understanding. Watch out for children who are slow to respond or rarely ask for clarification**

- Can children tell you when they haven't understood and be reasonably clear about what elements they're struggling with? Give children instructions that contain vocabulary you know they won't understand. How do they respond?
- Can they make inferences? Tell the children you're going to do a quiz, say different statements where they have to infer meaning, E.g. *"Today I need my umbrella – what do you know that I am not telling you?"*
- Can they pick out key pieces of information? At the end of a lesson, get the children to tell you the most important points.

## Check out how children can take part

**Watch out for social interaction. Are there some children who seem isolated, find it hard to join in or come across as rude or immature?**

- Do they manage to keep conversations going, ask questions, make comments and show interest in each other?
- Have you noticed children being more aware of the need to talk differently in different situations? E.g. With school visitors or speaking in an assembly.

## Top 4 suggestions to support development of speaking and listening

1. To develop concept vocabulary, have a box of words related to time/measurement/size/shape – encourage children to choose a word, say what they know about it, how it can be used, E.g. *"Octagon is a shape with 8 sides, I remember it because it's like octopus, 8 legs!"*
2. Children may need time to think before responding to questions and instructions. Give them time for thinking and processing.
3. Play inferencing games to build these complex language skills – *"What do I mean when I say... you'll need a warm coat?"*, *"How do you know..."*.
4. Encourage children to comment on their own sentences – do they include a connecting word, do they have lots of descriptive words?

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You should also talk to the child's parents about your concerns.

# By age 11...

## Attention, listening and understanding

Children are good at listening and can do so for longer periods of time. They can also notice and may comment on not only what's been said but *how* it's been said.

## Children at 11 should be able to...

- Begin to appreciate sarcasm when it's obvious, E.g. *"My best vase, broken, now that was really clever"*
- Understand different question types:  
Open questions – *"Can you tell me all about your visit to the museum?"*  
Closed questions – *"Did you enjoy your trip to the museum?"* Rhetorical questions – *"Wasn't that a lovely trip to the museum?"*
- Understand and enjoy simple jokes and recognise simple idioms, but can't really explain why they're funny or what they mean, E.g. Doing something 'at the drop of a hat'

## Vocabulary

Vocabulary continues to grow, with children using a wider range and more varied vocabulary to describe actions and feelings.

## Children at 11 should be able to...

- Use sophisticated words but meaning might not always be accurate, E.g. *"I had to co-operate really hard to get the work done"*
- Know that words can have two meanings, uses them appropriately but can't always explain how they're connected, E.g. 'Watch' (the TV and on your wrist) or 'bark' (like a dog and on a tree)





### Sentence building and grammar

Long and complex sentences are used. In conversations, the average sentence length is around 7-10 words, although this can be longer when storytelling and often shorter in conversations.

#### Children at 11 should be able to...

- Use long and complex sentence structures including more sophisticated connectives to join ideas together in conversation, E.g. 'Meanwhile', 'therefore' or 'yet'
- Use questions to help conversations flow
- Explain some rules of grammar and know when a sentence is not grammatically correct

### Storytelling and narrative

Storytelling and narrative skills have great importance, both within the curriculum for describing, planning and explaining, and as part of children's social experiences and relationships.

#### Children at 11 should be able to...

- Tell elaborate entertaining stories which are full of detailed descriptions
- Use everyday language that is detailed and about experiences that may have happened some time ago or are planned for the future
- Incorporate a subplot in telling stories and recalling events, before resolving the main storyline



**By age 11...**

# By age 11...

## Conversations and social interaction

Children at this age communicate successfully. They share ideas and information, give and receive advice, offer an opinion and take notice of the opinion of others.

## Children at 11 should be able to...

- Negotiate an agreement explaining other options and possible outcomes
- Manage and organise collaborative tasks with little adult supervision
- Realise when people don't fully understand and try to help them
- Enjoy organising group games and can explain the rules effectively



# How to check it out

By age 11...

## Check out how children can talk

**Listen out for children's language. Watch out for those who struggle**

→ Can they explain the rules of grammar and do they know when a sentence is not grammatically correct? E.g. Say individual sentences – encourage children to hold up a green traffic light card if they think it's grammatically correct, an orange coloured card if they're not sure and a red card if they think it's not correct.

→ Can they use questions to help conversations flow? Have the children pair up and tell each other about a recent event. Encourage them to ask questions of each other. Do some children struggle?

## Check out how children can listen

**Check out children's listening and understanding. Watch out for children who are slow to respond or rarely ask for clarification**

→ Have a range of words that have two meanings, can children tell you different meanings of the words? E.g. A pen you write with and a pen where we keep animals.

→ Can they understand different question types? For example – Ask an open question “*What has happened to the sugar?*” – can they give a full appropriate answer?

– Ask a closed question “*Which is most soluble, icing sugar or brown sugar?*” Can they give the short answer required?

– With a rhetorical question, do they know no answer is needed “*What a great experiment.*”

→ Watch out for literacy or behaviour difficulties – these are strongly linked with speech, language and communication needs (see page 25) and can mask underlying language difficulties.

## Check out how children can take part

**Watch out for social interaction. Are there some children who seem isolated, find it hard to join in or come across as rude or immature?**

→ Can they negotiate and explain different scenarios and possible outcomes? Set up a class debate – are children able to present clear arguments and evidence, negotiating and using persuasive arguments?

→ Can they organise group games and explain the rules effectively?

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You should also talk to the child's parents about your concerns.

## Top 4 suggestions to support development of speaking and listening

1. Play around with words – have a range of words with more than one meaning and get children to explain the meaning. Get children to build category maps or word webs for topic vocabulary.

2. Give children plenty of time to think before responding to questions and instructions.

3. Encourage an ethos of asking for clarification, saying when they haven't understood something, or what they're struggling with.

4. Encourage children to support each other's thinking – act like a detective – how do we know this will happen, how do we know this character is good – what evidence can we find?

# Top tips for children aged 5 to 11

## What can you do to support language and communication with the children you work with?

- Using the **right level of language** for each child and knowing how to build on their language skills is key – this is why it's so important to know how language develops.
- Check that children understand the language used and instructions given – ask them to repeat back what they think you said or what they need to do.
- When talking to children add one or two words to the sentence length they already use in their own talking, this provides a model of language that children can follow and build on.
- Decide on 5 key strategies you want to use – choose from the ones on the next page or from other websites/publications. Ensure all staff know which strategies are being focused on and how they can be put in to practice.



## As a practitioner

Things you can do as a practitioner to support communication.

- Ask open-ended questions (which are difficult to give a yes/no or one word answer) and ask children to elaborate on and explain their response. This helps develop strong communication skills
- Talk about what children are interested in – let them talk first and let them lead the conversation
- Use comments and prompts rather than questions, E.g. Say “*what a tall tower*” “*it will be as tall as you*” instead of “*what are you building?*”
- ‘Model’ good communication. Children learn from what they see and hear
- Give children time to work out what you’ve said and what they want to say
- Have conversations about how people feel and how that affects what they do. This is important in order to learn social interaction skills

## As a school

Things your school can do to support communication.

- Use visual support, pictures, photographs, signs and symbols to help support a child’s understanding and use of language to communicate
- Encourage an ‘asking friendly’ environment, where children are encouraged to say when they don’t understand or need help
- Staff can support the interaction of children with other children, E.g. By organising games, creating quiet areas, or setting up a friendship bench
- Have consistent, predictable structures and routines so children know what to expect
- Reduce background noise, E.g. Music or radio, so that children can concentrate on what you / each other are saying
- Use your contact with parents to share ideas about how they can support their own child’s language and communication skills
- Ensure all staff know about the links between language, behaviour, learning, play and social interaction

# English as an additional language

Some estimates suggest that as much as two-thirds of the world's population speak more than one language.

Speaking more than one language is a positive and beneficial skill and should be celebrated.

There is no evidence to suggest that learning more than one language will delay the development of speech and language skills. In fact, learning more than one language at once can have many positive benefits for children.

For children learning English as an additional language:

→ It is important to recognise and value all languages

→ Accept and praise words and phrases used in home languages and give English equivalents where appropriate

→ Encourage parents of children learning English as an additional language to continue to talk to their children in their home language.

Different languages have different sound and grammatical systems; the ages and stages used in this booklet refer to English.



# Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)

Around 10% of all children have long term, persistent SLCN and many more have less severe needs. Children with SLCN may have difficulties with:

→ **Speech sounds** – children may have speech that is difficult to understand. They may not say the right sounds for their age or may mix up and miss out sounds in words, making their speech unclear, E.g. “A tup of tea”

→ **Fluency** – children might have hesitations in their speech and may prolong or repeat sounds and parts of words or sentences. They may struggle to get their words out at all. Getting ‘stuck’ on words in this way is sometimes referred to as stammering or stuttering.

→ **Understanding of language** – children may struggle to understand words or sentences that are being used or to follow instructions they hear.

→ **Spoken language** – children may use a limited number of words in their talking or be unable to put words together to form sentences. What they say may be very muddled and disorganised and difficult for someone to follow and understand. Some children might struggle to find the word that they know they want to say.

→ **Social use of language** – children may have a good vocabulary and can put sentences together, but they may struggle to know how to use their language to have conversations, play and socially interact well with others.

→ **Listening and attention** – children may have difficulties listening to what has been said to them and may struggle to concentrate on a game or activity for even a short period of time, flitting from one task to another without completing anything.

Children with SLCN can also have any combination of the above. You may have children in your setting who have identified SLCN. You may have a speech and language therapist or other specialist you are involved with working together with these children.

For more information on SLCN please go to [www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/resources/resources-for-practitioners](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/resources/resources-for-practitioners) and view the booklet Misunderstood.

If you are worried about a child in your care there is more information on [www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk)

# Find out more

## Talking Point

[www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk)

A website all about children's speech, language and communication, designed for parents, people that work with children, and children and young people themselves. It contains information about supporting children's speech and language development, and helps you to identify if a child is having difficulties or falling behind. If they're struggling, then it tells you what you could do to help, or who you could get help from.

## Progression Tools from The Communication Trust

If you still have concerns about a child's speech, language and communication skills you could use a Progression Tool to help identify where children are at in relation to their age and how they are progressing with developing these vital communication skills.

Progression Tools are available for the following key ages of development in primary school: 4, 5-6, 7-8 and 9-10 years old. Each tool covers different aspects of speech, language and communication where two types of information are gathered: one through direct questions with the child and one by capturing your own observations or knowledge of the child.

The Progression Tools will give information to help you decide whether a child would benefit from a targeted intervention or whether they may need more specialist assessment and support and need referring to a speech and language therapist.

If you would like further information about the progression tools please go to: [www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/resources/resources/resources-for-practitioners/progression-tools-primary/](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/resources/resources/resources-for-practitioners/progression-tools-primary/)

## Your local offer

For children and young people who have, or may have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), including speech, language and communication needs, you can find out more about services available in your area by looking up your local authority's 'local offer' which is published on their website. The local offer clearly sets out what services are available in your area for children with SEND from birth until they are 25 years old. It might be useful to talk through some of the services with parents and support them to find out more about the services available to them.

## The Communication Consortium

To find out more about the organisations involved in The Communication Trust please go to:

[www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/partners](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/partners)

If your organisation would like to become a member of The Communication Trust's consortium please go to

[www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/partners/consortium](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/partners/consortium)

for more information or e-mail [enquiries@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk)

# Frequently asked questions

## **What should I do if I am concerned about a child who has not been identified with speech, language and communication needs?**

Talk to parents to gain further information. If together you decide it is appropriate to refer to Speech and Language Therapy, you can do so if you get parent's permission. Speech and Language Therapists can offer more detailed assessment and advice and support for children with speech, language and communication issues. Anyone can refer to a Speech and Language Therapist, including the parents. If you ring your local speech and language therapy department, they will be able to advise you on the best way to make a referral. Sometimes referrals can be taken over the phone. You don't have to go through a GP, health visitor or school nurse. You always have to get permission from parents to refer their child to other services such as this.

## **How can I find out if I need to improve my knowledge and skills in children's communication and where can I find out about further training?**

You could complete the Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF). The SLCF outlines what people who work with children and young people need to know and be able to do in order to support children's communication. For more information about the SLCF go to [www.talkingpoint.org.uk/slcf](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk/slcf)



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Every child understood

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