ROYAL COLLEGE OF SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPISTS

Speech, Language and Communication Factsheet
(August 2016)

This fact sheet, compiled by members of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, aims to help inspectors of nurseries and child care settings to identify good practice in respect of children's speech, language and communication development.
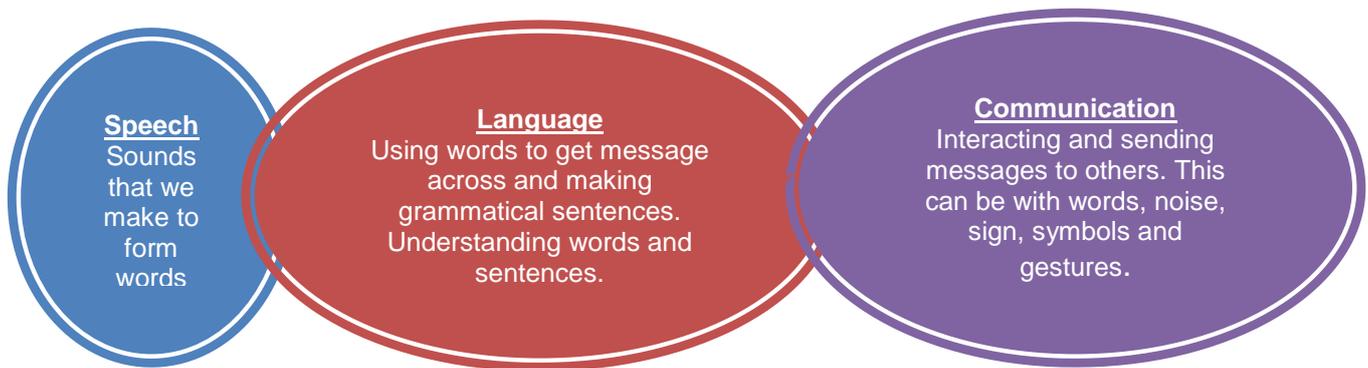
Speech, Language and Communication Needs – why does it matter?

Speech, language and communication (SLC) are fundamental skills and set the foundation for children developing in literacy, numeracy and social skills. Research shows that a number of children are at risk of SLC delay or disorder which can impact on their future attainment and all "SHANARRI" Outcomes.

- Speech, language and communication needs are the most common type of special educational need in 4-11 year old children.
- Children with the following conditions typically have SLC needs – Autistic Spectrum Disorder, cerebral palsy; Downs Syndrome; learning difficulties; dyspraxia; dysarthria; dyslexia, hearing impairment.
- 7% of children aged 5 years have specific speech and language impairment and a further 1.8% have speech, language and communication needs linked to other conditions such as learning disability, cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorders.
- 50% of socioeconomically disadvantaged children lag behind their high income counterparts at school entry by up to 16 months in vocabulary. The gap in language is very much larger than gaps in other cognitive skills (Waldfogel and Washbrook, 2010; Growing Up In Scotland 2015).
- 40% of 7- 14 year olds referred to child psychiatric services have been found to have language impairment (Cohen et al, 1998) as do 60% of young offenders (Bryan et al, 2008). For many of these children and young people SLC needs had not previously been identified.
- Speech, language and communication needs are a risk factor for those 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (Scottish Executive, 2005)
- **Children's vocabulary and ability to talk in two-to-three-word sentences at age two is a strong predictor of 'school readiness' at four, as measured by baseline assessments of reading, maths and writing (Roulstone et al, 2011).**

Numerous policies and laws place a responsibility on early years settings to act to enable a child's SLC development and inclusion including – Getting It Right For Every Child; National Care Standards; Building the Ambition and CYP Act (Scotland) 2015.

What do we mean by Speech, Language and Communication?

Speech
Sounds that we make to form words

Language
Using words to get message across and making grammatical sentences. Understanding words and sentences.

Communication
Interacting and sending messages to others. This can be with words, noise, sign, symbols and gestures.

Early Years Best Practice in a Nutshell

Early intervention is key to ensuring that children have the best chance to develop strong speech, language and communication skills. Parents, Early Years practitioners and the Early Years environment play a critical role in helping children to develop SLC skills, to learn, attain and get ready for starting school.

Create an Environment that.....

- Supports children to listen, look and attend effectively by being aware of acoustics and reducing distractions where possible
- Is organised to allow children to access quiet areas, away from noise and distractions
- Uses visual helpers (pictures/objects/sign/gestures) to support children with vocabulary development, transitions, routines and organisation skills
- Uses visual helpers consistently and makes sure they are available throughout the day
- Provides children with appropriate resources that take development stages into account, not just their age
- Includes spaces to allow small groups activities to occur and children to be able to interact in pairs and small groups
- Has SLC information displayed and available for both staff and parents and carers
- Makes it easy for parents and carers to discuss their child's progress and areas for development with staff
- Is inclusive of parents and carers with SLC needs or English as an additional language by adapting information to make it accessible for all

Staff who....

- Talk and play face to face with the children
- Talk and play in a responsive, child-led way, even during free-play
- Know the importance of waiting to allow children to initiate and respond in interactions to help learn how to take equal turns.
- Know the best way to ask children questions to encourage interaction and turn-taking
- Balance questions with comments and understand that commenting is the best way to build vocabulary
- Copy what the child has said and add another word to show children how to make longer and more complete sentences
- Adapt their own language levels and interactions to match each child's stage and conversation style
- Are aware of developmental milestones for children's speech, language and communication development and impact of SLC needs on learning, listening behaviour and other outcomes
- Understand that visual helpers (picture/objects/sign/gestures) enable children to understand, express themselves and take more turns
- Are aware of the importance of early intervention
- Are aware of the strategies to empower parents / carers promote speech, language and communication development in children aged 0-5 years.
- Can signpost parents to appropriate speech, language and communication support services
- Know when and how to make an appropriate referral to SLT

Create Experiences that...

- Are adapted and accessible for all and take developmental stage, ability, learning styles and interests into account
- Encourage a range of interaction opportunities e.g. in large groups, small groups and pairs.
- Are planned to include lots of opportunities for diverse interaction, communication and vocabulary learning and development.
- Offer objects, pictures, symbols, sign and gesture to teach and reinforce meaningful vocabulary
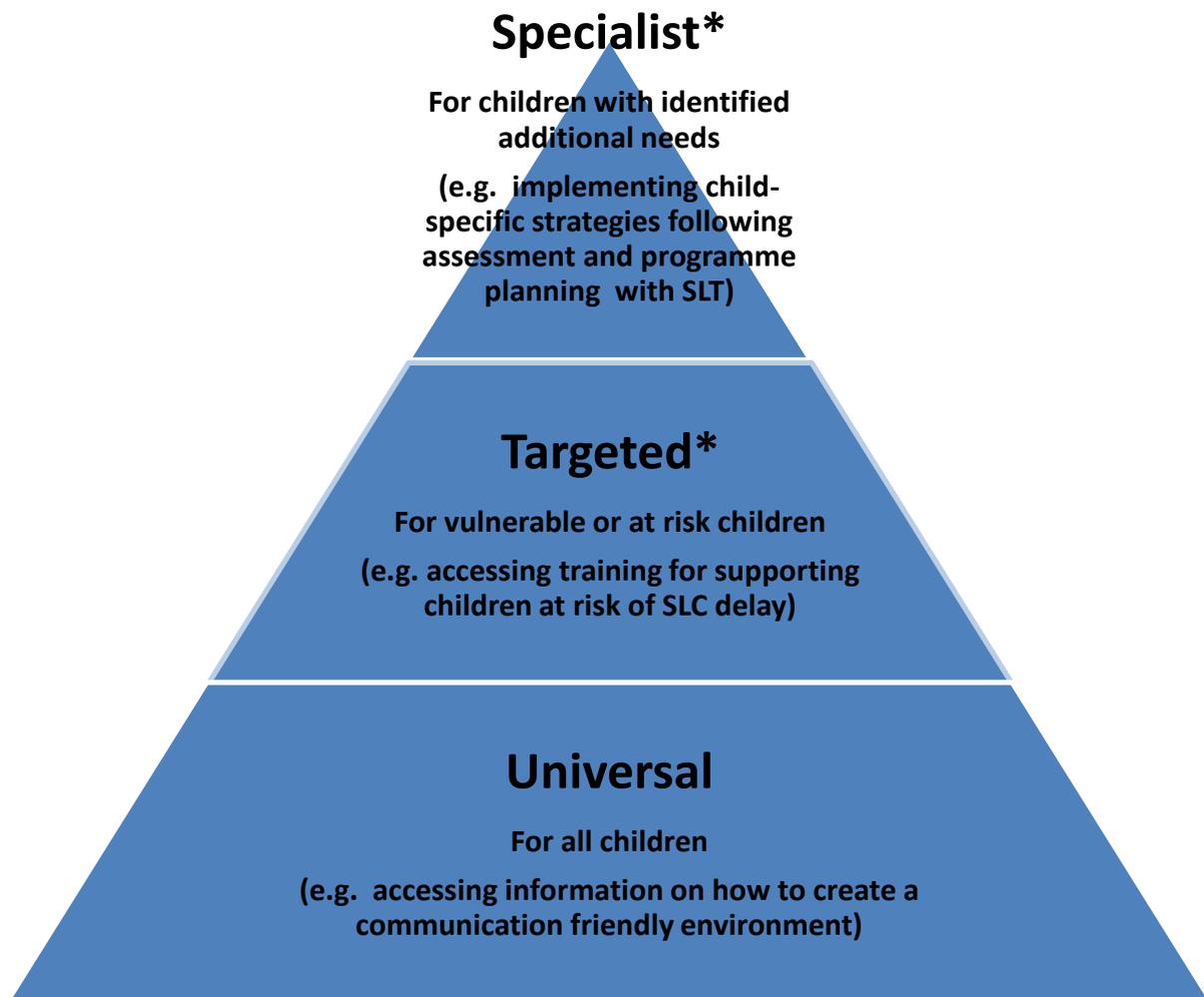
An organisation that...

- Explicitly recognises importance of SLC in staff induction, CPD programmes and organisational policy and practice.
- Has strong and positive relationship with local SLT services including clear referral pathway; up to date training programme for staff.

Red flags for poor practice;

- Staff not responding to children's communication attempts.
- Staff using question-only means to communicate with children
- Staff not adapting their SLC when child having difficulty understanding.
- No or little use of non verbal and visual supports during interactions and learning activities and in environments.
- Very quiet or very noisy environments
- High levels of challenging behaviour with one or a number of children.
- Little or no adaptation of information for parents who may have SLC needs and / or English as a second language.
- No generic SLC training required of all staff.

What is available locally?

Always check the local approaches for SLC development in the area prior to the inspection visit. A range of service levels should be available and include:

Specialist*

For children with identified additional needs

(e.g. implementing child-specific strategies following assessment and programme planning with SLT)

Targeted*

For vulnerable or at risk children

(e.g. accessing training for supporting children at risk of SLC delay)

Universal

For all children

(e.g. accessing information on how to create a communication friendly environment)

*Note: The CYP Act uses the term "Targeted intervention" to mean the equivalent of "Specialist intervention" as set out in this diagram.

Useful Websites and sources of support

www.playtalkread.org

Bookbug -
www.scottishbooktrust.com/bookbug

Play@Home -
http://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/info-for-families/resources/play@home-(nhs-health-scotland).aspx

www.ican.org.uk

www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

www.talkingpoint.org.uk

www.literacytrust.org.uk

www.hanen.org

www.stammering.org

Examples of Good Practice at time of writing include;

- Words Up - Highland Literacy Model - https://highlandliteracy.com/words-up-key-messages/

- SPIN Project North Ayrshire - http://www.carena.org.uk/its-all-about-spin/

- Before Words - http://www.before-words.co.uk/

- Aberdeenshire Council'sTotal Communication Policy – available on request.

- West Dunbartonshire's Communication Link Person (CLP) Programme

For further Information on SLC best practice in Scotland contact
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References

Bryan K. (2008) Speech, Language and Communication difficulties in juvenile offenders. In C. Hudson (ed) *The Sound and the Silence: Key Perspectives on Speaking and Listening and Skills for Life*. Coventry: Quality Improvement Agency.

Cohen N, et al. (1998) Language, social cognitive processing and behavioural characteristics of psychiatrically disturbed children with previously identified and unsuspected language impairments. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 39:865-877.*

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