

SLCN and SEMH (RPs)

Communication and Interaction Team
Specialist Teacher Advisory Service

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Communication Friendly

Please stop us if...



we say something that you do not understand

we speak too fast

you want us to repeat something

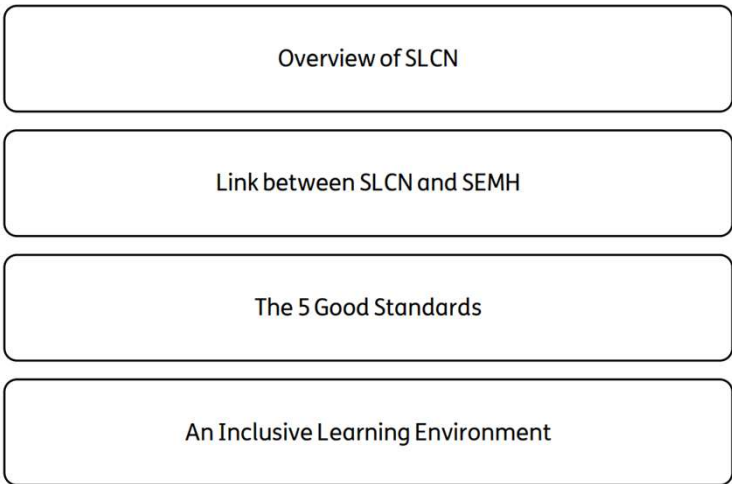
You have a question



Ordinarily Available provision

2

Training Structure



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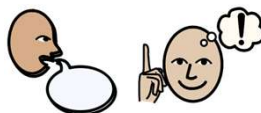
Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)

What is SLCN?

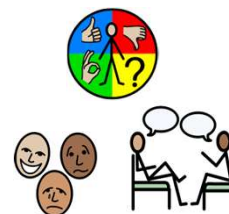
Short or Long Term Difficulties with



Speech



Language

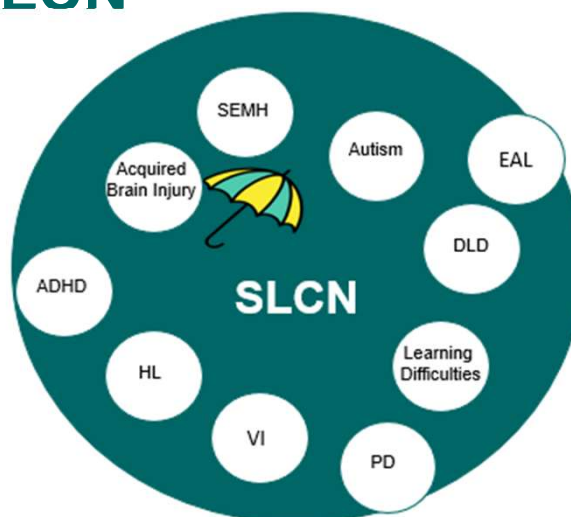


Communication

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CYP with Other Diagnosis or Designation with SLCN



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Children aged 7 – 11 years



Typical development by 11yrs old:

- Use sentences to link ideas together
- Sentences usually have 8-10 words
- Can make up complicated stories including lots of information and characters
- Talk using more advanced words such as 'massive'
- Understand others point of view, agree and disagree
- Start conversations with children and adults they don't know
- Understand long requests with lots of information
- Talk clearly so everyone can understand them

Common difficulties by 11 yrs old:

- Struggling to join in group conversations
- Find it hard to make up stories
- Stories can be muddled, making it difficult to follow
- Struggle to learn and understand the meaning of words
- Find it hard to predict what happens next in stories
- Find it hard to learn at school – struggle to understand what they are supposed to be doing

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Typical Development – Age 14



Talk in longer sentences; usually 7-12 words or more.

Join sentences together using a range of joining words, such as 'meanwhile', 'however', 'except' so that they can explain more complicated ideas.

Be able to use sarcasm and know when others are being sarcastic to them.

Be able to change topics well in conversations.

Use more subtle and witty humour.

Show some understanding of idioms, such as "put your money where your mouth is!".

Know that they talk differently to friends than to teachers. They are able to adjust the way they are talking easily depending on who they are talking to.

Understand and use slang terms with friends. They keep up with rapidly changing 'street talk'.

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Common Difficulties – Age 14



Difficulty giving specific answers or explanations.

Difficulty telling their ideas in the right order.

Better at understanding individual instructions than group instructions.

Difficult to understand hidden meanings. For example, they wouldn't understand that someone wants to close the window or turn up the heating when they say, 'It's a bit chilly in here!'.

Long and complicated instructions are hard to understand.

Trouble learning new words.

Take a long time to organise what they are going to say or write.

Take what others say literally. For example, they don't understand that someone could take longer than one minute if they say, "I'll be back in a minute".

Difficulty taking turns in conversations.

Talk to teachers and friends in the same way instead of adjusting their style of talking based on who they are talking to.

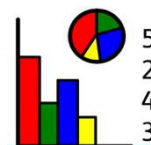
Stammering, selective mutism, word finding

Slow processing

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The Size of the Issue



How Many?

- Can affect adults and children.
- Around 10% of children - two or three in every classroom. Of that 10%, approx:
- 6% have primary SLCN
- 2% have associated SLCN
- 1% have severe and complex SLCN
- Affects 50%+ of all children in areas of social disadvantage.
- Up to 90% of young people in the youth justice system have SLCN, many of whom are not identified before offending.

What is the Impact?

- Long term impact on literacy and ability to demonstrate understanding in written form.
- Just 15% of young people with SLCN achieve 5 GCSE A* - C or equivalent compared to 57% of all young people.
- More likely to suffer with long term mental health difficulties, isolation and unemployment.
- Less likely to access appropriate health care or respond to social interventions.
- Higher risk of abuse, radicalisation and social manipulation (e.g. county lines).

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Activity - SLCN



What sort of difficulties with SLCN do you notice in your setting?

What strategies do you use to overcome these?

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Why is Language Important for Mental Health?

[Why is language important for mental health? – YouTube](#)

WORDS FOR WELLBEING:
WHY LANGUAGE IS IMPORTANT
FOR MENTAL HEALTH



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Possible impact on....school/learning



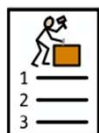
Difficulty remembering information/learning

Poor concentration

Following a class input

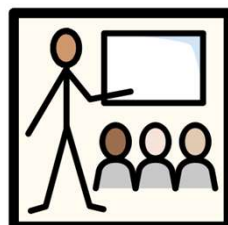
Low literacy skills

Withdrawn



Narrative and sequencing

Word problems, e.g. Maths, science



Don't engage in work tasks

Fear of failure

Lower academic achievement

Refuse/avoid lessons and activities



Working independently

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Possible Impact on...Behaviour (Behaviour is communication)

Don't follow instructions

Poor attention

Impulsive

Non-compliant/obstructive

Physically challenging behaviour

Emotional outbursts

Swearing

Can't explain something that happened/why it happened

Refuse/avoid lessons and activities

Won't engage in activities/discussion that may be challenging

Can't explain how they feel

Repeat similar behaviours although consequences discussed

Appear to not care/show remorse for actions.

Don't understand the impact on other's feelings

Difficulty predicting consequences

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Possible Impact on.... Social, Emotional and Mental Health

Poor conversation skills

Difficulty understanding and naming emotions

Hard to control emotions - outbursts

Don't understand impact of behaviour on other's feelings

Appear not to care/show remorse for actions

Anxiety

Low self-esteem

Difficulty interacting with others

Difficulty making and keeping friends

Struggle to problem-solve

Difficulty predicting consequences

Unexpected responses to situations

Negative friendships

Easily led/ vulnerable

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SEMH and SLCN: Size of the Issue...

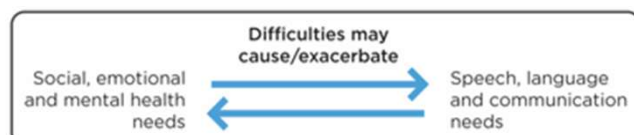
- 81% of children with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD) have significant unidentified communication needs.
- 57% of children with diagnosed language deficits are identified with EBD.
- In a study of pupils at risk of exclusion from school, two thirds were found to have SLCN.
- Excluded boys had significantly poorer expressive language skills than their peers who had not been excluded from school; many of their difficulties had not previously been identified.
- More than 60% of young people who are accessing youth justice services present with SLCN which are largely unrecognised.
- Children with persistent and severe conduct problems are about three times more likely to have low verbal ability than children with a low risk of conduct problems.

<https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/media/Project/RCSLT/rcslt-behaviour-a4-factsheet.pdf>

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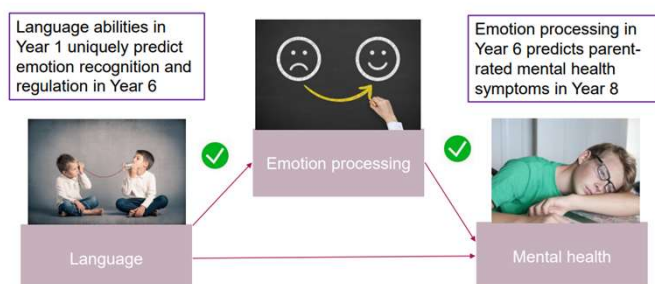
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Links between SLCN and SEMH



There is a bi-directional relationship between SLCN and SEMH, difficulties in one area can feed into the other and vice versa

LANGUAGE is important for MENTAL HEALTH:



- (1) Language skills are essential to accessing 'talking therapies'
- (2) Language interventions that target emotion processes should have positive impacts on mental health

"Communication difficulties are a barrier both to diagnosis and to accessing mental health interventions which tend to be verbally delivered e.g. cognitive behavioural therapy."

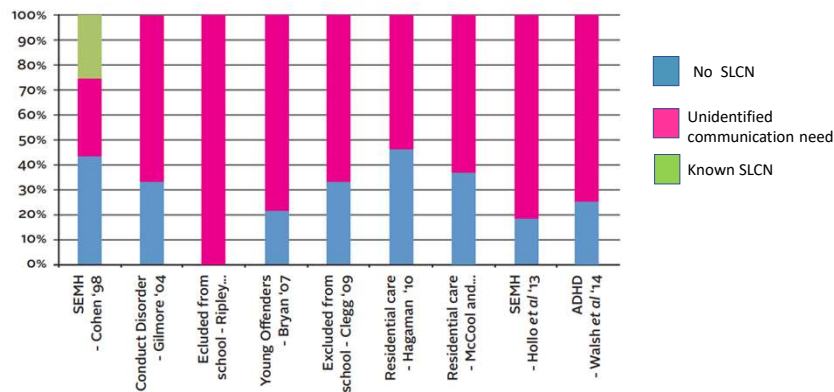
Improving mental health outcomes for school age children: evidence of links with speech, language and communication, Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) 2019

https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Norbury_APPG_2022.pdf

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Undetected Communication and Interaction difficulties in SEMH

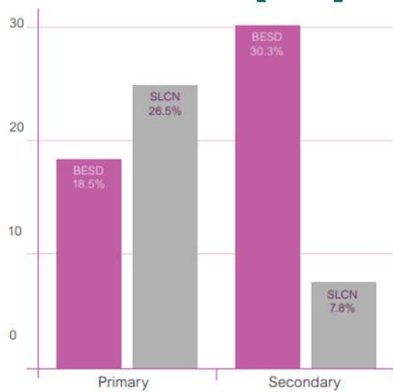


RCSLT Supporting social, emotional and mental health and well being

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Secondary students with SLCN – a hidden population



DfE (2010) National Statistics for First Release Special Educational Needs

SLCN in adolescents are often described as 'hidden'.

The profile of SLCN changes over time; **social communication difficulties becoming more prominent**

Associated **behaviour, emotional and social difficulties (BESD)** or literacy difficulties may be most visible.

Good 'surface' language may make everyday conversation manageable, effectively **masking underlying SLCN**.

Source: ICAN Talk Series: SLCN in Secondary Aged pupils

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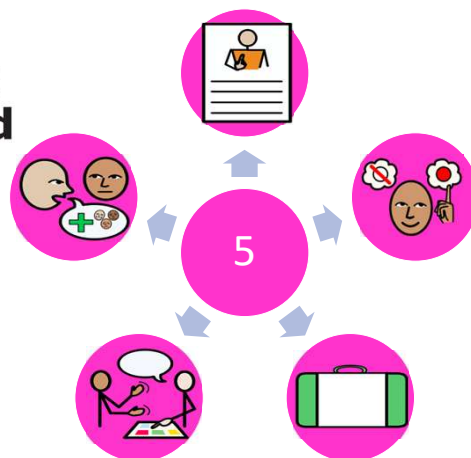
BREAK



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Supporting children and young people with SEMH: the five good communication standards



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1. What Works for Me?



CYP: There is good information that tells people how best to communicate with me.

Do you:

Share a communication passport, report or provision map detailing strategies or communication aids that the child or young person finds useful?

Use this as a working document that grows and develops with the child or young person's skills?

Create opportunities for shared problem solving amongst staff and with parents/carers?

Develop the CYP's self-awareness, independence and progress towards PfA outcomes?

Support CYP to take part in the wider life of the school?

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2. Making Decisions



CYP: Staff help me to be involved in making decisions about my care and support.

Do you:

Offer a range of ways to help the child express their views, set goals and recognise achievements e.g. sorting cards or mind maps?

Have materials available to suit different language and cognitive levels?

Check the CYP's understanding e.g. "Tell me what this means to you?"

Prepare the CYP for meetings – so that they can explain procedures and jargon?

Involve CYP in decisions about their support e.g. in support plans or risk assessments?

Provide opportunities to participate in decisions in ways that suit them?

Aim to develop their capacity to make their own decisions?

Ask CYP their view on how well adults communicate with them?

Ensure all staff are trained in varied communication methods?

Ensure CYP have a choice as to their advocate?



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3. and 4. Communication



CYP: Staff are good at supporting me with my communication. I have lots of chances to communicate.

Do you:

Provide regular CPD and reminders about communication friendly strategies?

Have established ways to share best practice amongst staff?

Model good communication as part of quality-first teaching and create a communication-friendly environment?

Use non-lesson time to create communication opportunities e.g. lunchtimes or tutor sessions?

Provide opportunities for CYP to discuss anything they wish with key adults?

Include CYP in planning these opportunities?

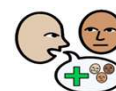
Gain feedback from parents/carers about what's working?



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5. Health and Emotional Well-Being



CYP: Staff help me to understand and communicate about my health and how I am feeling.

Do you:

Ensure staff delivering health and wellbeing advice and support adapt their approach to account for SLCN?

Provide a range of opportunities for CYP to express their health and wellbeing needs and access support for emotional literacy?

Provide 'easy read' information related to health and emotional wellbeing, as well as safeguarding including consent and bullying etc?

Check that CYP understand what we mean in these areas, feel listened to and understood?

Provide CPD so that staff use active, mindful listening and are empathetic and non-judgmental?

Use consistent, shared vocabulary for emotions and emotional regulation, self-esteem, anxiety and worries across your school?

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An Inclusive Learning Environment



Good Communication Strategies



Use of visuals



Adult-Child Language



SEMH Support



Sensory Environment



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Strategies for Communication and Language Difficulties



Use the CYP name to gain their attention before speaking to them

Ensure the child stops what they are doing to listen

Limit the amount of speech, keep it clear and simple

Slow down the pace of verbal delivery

Cue into new information

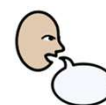
Give instructions in the correct order

Give plenty of time for the CYP to process information – 10 seconds is best

If you need to repeat something, use the same wording

Ask the child to look towards you and get down to the child's level when speaking

Use visuals to enhance understanding of the words used



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Strategies for Communication and Language Difficulties



Check understanding by asking CYP to explain using their own words, don't assume they understand

Do not expect CYP to listen and do at the same time

Explain idioms and metaphors that are used

Be direct – don't ask if you are telling – not "shall we start now?" but "OK, let's start here..."

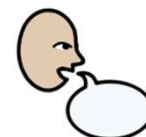
Limit the number of questions used – use 'I wonder...'

Offer choices

Repeat mispronounced words/sentences correctly – do not correct their speech, just repeat with emphasis on correct word

Repeat sentences back with extended language ie. rather than 'the bus', say 'the big red bus'

Consistent use of visuals throughout school with pictures and labels for resources



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Strategies for Social Interaction Difficulties



Carefully consider seating plans and pairs/groupings

Give a specific role in group work

Ask the CYP where they prefer to sit – some prefer to sit at the back of the room or with their back to the wall

Scaffold conversations and model what the child could say

Create a script to allow the child to successfully integrate into unstructured activities

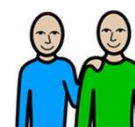
Keep non-verbal signals simple and clear

Think about the non-verbal cues you are using – tone and pitch of voice can easily be misinterpreted



Support interactions at break and lunch with different groups of children

Support to participate in wider school activities such as after school clubs or other experiences



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Who Uses Visuals?

“Research suggests that our brains process visuals 60,000 times faster than text, engaging multiple areas of the brain simultaneously. This engagement aids in retention and understanding, making visual learning a powerful tool in education”




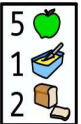



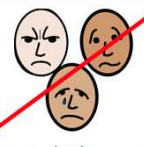
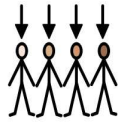
Matusiak et al. (2019)

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Why Visuals are Important

 reduce anxiety	 allow time to process information	 encourage independence
 increase understanding	 build confidence	 support transitions
 supports memory	 are non-judgemental	 help ALL CYP

Active
Consistent
Colour
Explicitly Taught
Synonymous
Selective

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Balancing our Adult Language



Repeated questioning like “What’s this?” or “Who did this?” can lead children to focus on guessing correct answers rather than developing spontaneous speech. This is called the interrogation effect.

Research shows that using comments instead of questions (e.g., “You used a lot of colours today” instead of “What did you draw?”) encourages richer, more meaningful dialogue.

Comments create space for narrative development, helping children express emotions and build stories rather than just reporting facts.

Constant questioning activates the brain’s stress response (amygdala) rather than language centres (Broca’s area), limiting creativity.

Reducing questions and focusing on observation and presence helps children speak more confidently and thoughtfully. Speech grows from being truly heard, not tested.

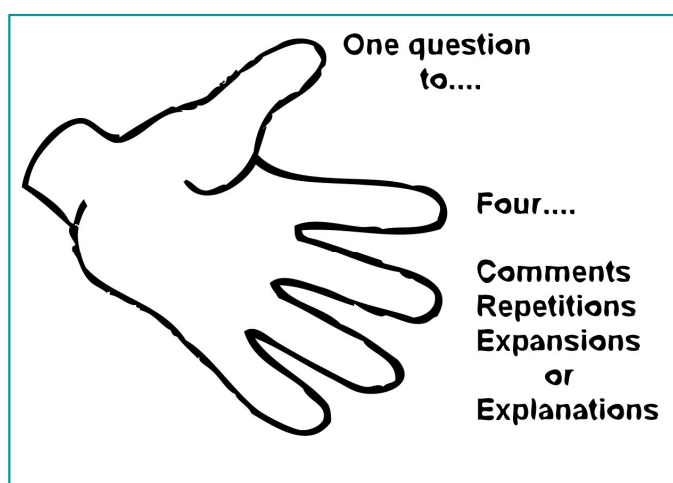
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The Hand Model



Can help us to remember not to ask too many questions and open up talk instead



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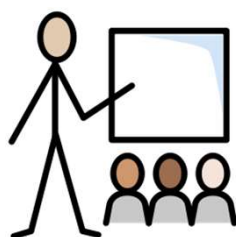
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The Blank Language Scheme








Proposed by Blank, Rose and Berlin (1978).

Their research focused on the language demands that students experience in the classroom. They also explored the language that adults use and graded it in relation to complexity.



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	Blank Level	Examples of Activities
	Naming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matching pictures • Finding objects • Labelling objects
	Describing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commenting on the colour, size, shape, function and other features of an object they can see, touch, or hear • Looking at pictures in a book
	Retelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retelling a story • Explaining what has happened • Giving definitions • Discuss a character
	Justifying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and explaining the relationship between objects and events • Problem solving • Make predictions about pictures or scenarios based on what they can see

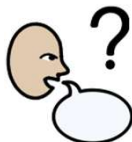
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Using the Blank Question Levels



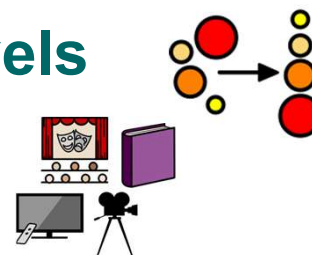
Assess level of current reasoning



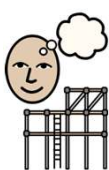
Start with questions that match the student's verbal reasoning



Beware that vocabulary can catch CYP out rather than the question



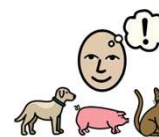
Adapt any situation or story to match the child's age and language level



Scaffold higher level questions



When sequencing, check language, use real situations, reduce the number of items to sequence if needed and leave gaps



Use your own experience and give choices to model making predictions

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Problem Solving



What happened

At level 2 - Who, Where, When

Label emotions

Tell the child what happened and how their behaviour affected others

Describe appropriate behaviours using short simple sentences

Don't ask questions

Use positive statements

Use the narrative prompts and visual support

Use comic strip conversations to explain why ... how people feel and what could be changed next time

At level 3 - What happened

Ask the child to describe what happened, what people said and how others felt (if they can)

Don't ask why the child behaved as they did or ask them to suggest solutions
State why he should not have done that/what he should have done

At level 4 - Why

Ask level 4 questions but if the child does not understand then repeat the question and model the answer

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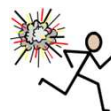
Vocabulary and Word Learning



Repeat words often

WOW

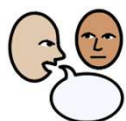
Word banks and word walls



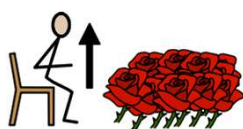
Use pictures or actions to give clues



Talk about the meaning of words



Make links between known words/concepts



Share different contexts of words



Teach multi-meaning words



Use semantic and phonological clues

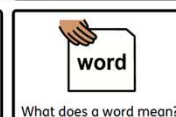
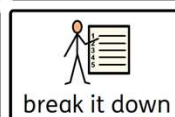
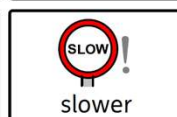
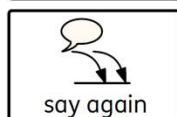
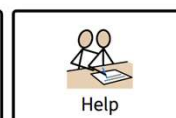
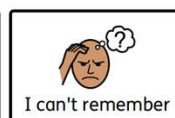
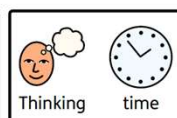
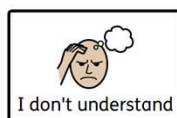
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Help/Speak Out Cards



Model using the phrases and symbols
Introduce and rehearse in a 1:1 or small group



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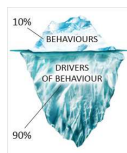
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Supporting SEMH



Behaviour is Communication

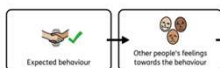
Emotion Coaching



Comic Strip Conversations



Social Situation Mapping



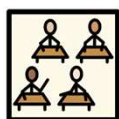
Time to talk



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The Environment



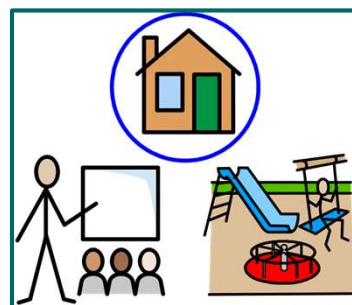
Predictable



Organised



Calming



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Sensory Friendly Spaces



Create sensory-friendly classrooms and quiet areas where CYP can take breaks if they feel overwhelmed. This can include dim lighting, noise-cancelling headphones, comfortable seating, tent.



Provide a 'hub'. A known, safe place in school staffed by trusted adults for CYP to regulate.



During transitions, support pupils with coming in school, organisation and routines, getting changed for PE.

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Additional Resources on STAS Moodle

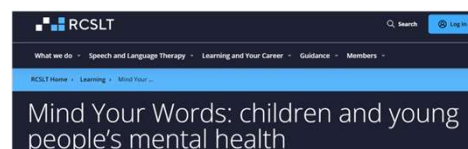


<p>C&I - Creating a Communication Friendly Environment C&I STAs Toolkit for Settings Strategies to create opportunities for all children and young people to develop their communication skills, listen, understand, talk and take part across...</p>	<p>C&I - Curriculum Advice C&I STAs Toolkit for Settings Strategies to support me within each topic of the curriculum</p>	

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Mind Your Words CPD



Free to access – just sign up for the course [Mind Your Words – mental health e-learning course | RCSLT](#)

The five core modules explain:

speech, language and communication (SLCN) needs

social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs

how to recognise them and the inter-relationship between SLCN and SEMH

some general strategies you can put in place

Additional modules:

10 further modules look in more detail at ways you can support children and young people, including getting support from speech and language therapy, working collaboratively, modifying risk assessment and de-escalation techniques, becoming a communication accessible service and much more.

[Course: E&I - CPD Opportunities to Support CYP with Communication and Interaction Difficulties | STAS and E&I Therapy](#)

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Next Steps

Learn more about SLCN and typical development including Universally Speaking documents

[Ages and stages - Speech and Language UK: Changing young lives](#)

Share the 5 Good Standards with your setting

[RCSLT-supporting-SEMH-5-good-communication-standards.pdf](#)

Sign up for the Mind Your Words course

[Mind Your Words – mental health e-learning course | RCSLT](#)

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SLCN and SEMH



What could you be doing differently?

What one thing are you going to take away and act on from this session?

What change could you make now?

How will you do it?

How will you remember to do it?

Who will check?

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And finally...

Questions and Evaluation



<https://forms.office.com/e/CzeyESRZWk>



Contact Us

Email Stas.service@hants.gov.uk

Phone 0370 779 0779

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