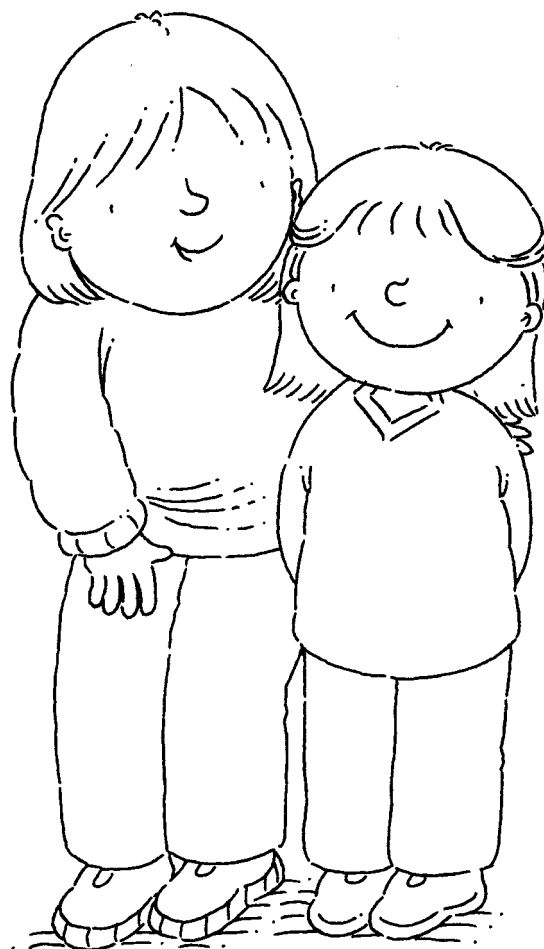


Contents

Preface	4
Introduction	5
Some Indicators of Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties	6
What is Communication Delay?	8
Who to ask for advice and support	12
What does this mean for the child?	14
How can the setting support the child?	16
How can the setting support the parents?	22
References and resources	25



Preface

Erin

Erin is just two years old and communicates very little to anyone in the setting, although her parents say she talks with them in the home. In the setting, she needs to concentrate very hard to follow spoken language and this is difficult if there is background noise and the instructions are not being given individually to her.

Group activities present problems for her if she is struggling to follow what is going on and can't take part. Her mother says things are better if she is encouraged to feel relaxed, as when she becomes anxious or withdrawn, her communication difficulties will feel and appear more pronounced.

When she is at home or in her nursery, Erin needs sensitive encouragement to ask and answer questions with an adult or another child.

An adult might say: 'I never know what Erin wants, she just points at things and cries when we don't understand her. She's always playing on her own'.

Erin might be feeling: frustrated, angry, emotional and frightened.

Her parent says: 'She's so shy; she never speaks to anyone... I just want to stop her clinging to me all the time'.

The focus of this book is on helping you to identify what it is that Erin, for example, is finding hard to do and then to use your observations and discussions to find ways of supporting her so that she can flourish and thrive to the best of her ability. If she can be prevented from experiencing repeated failure, she is more likely to develop resilience and the self-confidence to try new activities. We know that the early years are a very important time for physical, emotional, intellectual and social development, and both positive and negative experiences can have a profound influence on later learning and development.

This guide is not intended to cover all aspects of these difficulties, but it will give you a greater understanding of how speech, language and communication develop, as well as offering guidelines for support and signposts to further reading, professional development and useful resources.



Introduction

When a child seems to be falling behind others in their rate of early development, this can be a cause for worry and concern at home, at play and in early years settings. In the pre-school setting, you may be working with a child who has problems with their movement, social interaction or play skills and you may be looking for reasons to explain this and for advice on what you can do and how you can support both the child and his family. You may feel reluctant to discuss this with colleagues or parents if you feel they may not share your perceptions. However, a practitioner is not there to diagnose but to observe and identify where a child may be experiencing difficulties and to put strategies in place to support the child. If concerns still persist after a period of time, referral to a specialist should be considered and discussed.

Communication is fundamental for learning and development. Children and young people with a communication disability cannot express themselves, understand others or build relationships because of problems with language or communication. One in ten children and young people struggle with this invisible disability. Without the right help, at the right time, they will be left out and left behind. (I CAN www.ican.org.uk)

Many practitioners have concerns about children's speech, language and communication skills and this book aims to support you in the early identification of difficulties and in providing early support.

Speech and language difficulties account for one of the largest groups of young children needing support. In any Reception or Key Stage 1 classroom in the UK at least 10 per cent of children are likely to have significant difficulties in one or both areas. Some children start school with the speech and language levels of two-year-olds and there are an increasing number of children who have missed the concentrated language input provided by parents and carers which focuses on the child's play and interests. In primary schools, it is worthwhile noting that SLCN represent the most prevalent type of special educational need (23%) amongst pupils with statements of SEN, according to the I CAN publication, *Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Primary School-Aged Children* (I Can talk series). Issue 6.

with special educational needs (SEN). This is a four year programme covering the period 2008-2011 which will provide support for leadership teams, teachers and practitioners working with children with a range of special educational needs of all ages. The EYFS Inclusion Development Programme for Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) aims to help teachers and practitioners to develop their own skills in the identification of speech, language and communication needs and how to support them. It has identified that in some areas more than 50% of children enter school with 'transient' language communication difficulties. This refers to difficulties which are 'not lasting or remaining' and children are likely to catch up given the right support. Children with more persistent difficulties however will need differentiated support to reach the goals outlined in Every Child Matters. The resources are organized according to the four sections of the EYFS (A Unique Child, Positive Relationships, Enabling Environments, and Learning and Development). There are many resources available to help early years' practitioners in schools and settings in the early identification and support of children with speech, language and communication needs. To get the best from the resources it is recommended that colleagues work together, but you can also work through the materials on your own. You will learn more about:

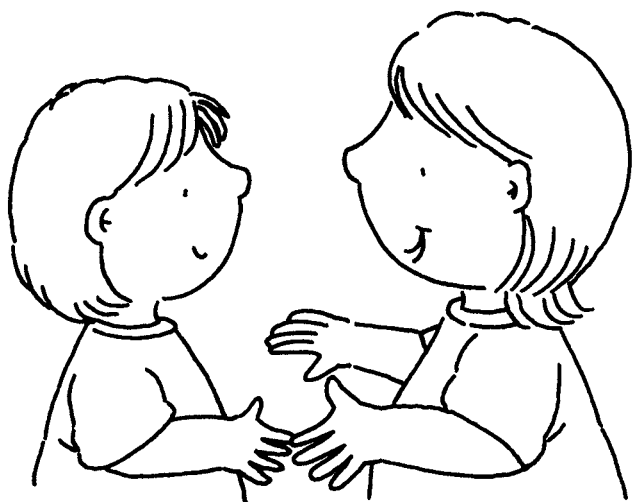
- children's language development
- how to identify children with particular needs
- best practice for children with SLCN
- effective ways to interact with children, parents and other professionals
- developing inclusive practice

(Source: (2008) *Inclusion Development Programme Supporting Children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs: Guidance for Practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage*. DCSF ref:00215-2008BKT-EN)

The Inclusion Development Programme

The Inclusion Development Programme (IDP) is part of the Government's strategy for including children

Some Indicators of Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties



Are you concerned about a child you know and observe who has a persistent combination or cluster of the difficulties below?

- The child's language sounds immature: may say phrases like 'Me do that' for much longer than you would expect
- Talks hesitantly with words pronounced incorrectly, uses simple sounds to replace more difficult ones
- Difficulty naming words, wrong choice of words
- Use of pointing, grunting and gesture as opposed to speech
- Problems with eating, drinking and swallowing
- Difficulty learning new vocabulary
- Looks blank when spoken to
- Poor listening skills
- Watches to see what other children are doing and seems hesitant to follow instructions
- May have social difficulties in relating to other children and may be prone to tantrums because of frustration

Parents may be told that their child who seems to be delayed in their development, according to developmental milestones, will usually catch up in their own time. This is true in some cases; however we know that not every child moves forward at the same pace or demonstrates new skills at the same time as other children around them. Development may be more advanced in some areas than others, and this can be confusing when trying to establish if there really is a problem.

Differences in Development in Boys and Girls

It is important to note that in general boys' language development can be slower than that of girls. This is said to relate to the relative immaturity of the male nervous system at birth. However, there may be other reasons why boys' language development appears to lag behind that of girls.

The University of Michigan's Department of Psychology cites evidence that girls start to talk before boys and also tend to have a higher vocabulary and make more two-word utterances. This is said to be because of the changes that take place in learning happen earlier for girls (between 14 and 20 months of age) than for boys (20–24 months of age). Some research has also shown that fathers will play more rough and tumble games with boys, while fathers are more likely to focus on different kinds of interactions and communication with their daughters.

Thinking Point

- What other reasons might there be for boys' language development and communication seeming to be less advanced than girls?
- Do you agree with the statements above?
- What effect might there be when there is a younger child in the family whose older sibling says everything for them?

What are the implications of this?

Boys may be assessed as being less able, when they are actually absorbed in other ways of exploring activities.

Boys may not be considered 'at risk' of communication difficulties until later, less likely to receive early intervention.

Adults may provide girls with explanations for events, instead of encouraging them to explore first hand through play.

Some children who begin in the setting with an apparent delay in the development of their skills quickly make progress as they are included in language rich activities. Others may be less forthcoming and need support to become more confident.

Note: These are broad statements which will not apply to all children: there will be boys who excel at language early on and girls who do not. The expectations of the setting and the child's cultural heritage can also have some influence on this.

However, when a child seems to have a cluster of ongoing challenges which are affecting their day to day living, steps need to be taken. It becomes increasingly important to identify areas of strength and areas which are most in need of targeted support and to put into place strategies to support firm foundations for learning and living.

Bilingualism

There may be many advantages to being exposed to more than one language from birth, including, for example, positive self-esteem and attitudes towards language learning, learning flexibility and increased problem-solving.

Some children who have English as an additional language may also have speech, language or communication difficulties; however it is important that practitioners recognize that a child must not be regarded as having a learning difficulty solely because their home language is different from the language in which they will be taught.

Thinking Point

Try to think of three ways to improve the way in which your setting demonstrates respect for the languages of bilingual children. Do they feel that their home language is valued and respected? How would you know?

When children mix words from both languages in their early years, it should be seen not as an indicator of confusion, but as an indicator of how children can make choices about how to express themselves most fluently. Young children (and many adults) think in their first language and they need to be able to practice this in the early years' setting as well as being given direct support for their language development.

Meeting Special Educational Needs

The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice gives guidance to early education settings and it sets out the procedures that must be followed. It places great emphasis on the early identification of special educational needs so that children can be helped as quickly as possible. It recognizes that children learn in different ways and that their needs should be met within a mainstream setting as far as possible. All children should have access to a broad balanced and relevant curriculum and the views of the parents and child (wherever possible) should be taken into account.

An important point to bear in mind is that the identification of, planning for, and working with, children with special needs is the responsibility of all staff.



What does this mean for the child?

Human beings communicate in numerous ways, and language forms only a small percentage of interaction. Children are keen observers of all forms of communication so as to make sense of what is going on and to be able to take part. Practitioners need to reflect on their observations of the children's communications and on their own ability to nurture good communication skills in all children, particularly those who might be unwilling or unable to communicate effectively.

Two year olds are definitely capable of being skillful communicators. But by this age it is possible to notice the impact of their early experiences. Young children need plenty of relaxed opportunities to talk as well as listen. Their language skills, as well as general learning, will be stunted if adults see communication mainly as 'I talk -you listen' or 'My questions are more important than yours.' (Lindon J (2008), *What Does It Mean to be Two (Revised Edition)*. Step Forward Publishing)



Erin will learn about people, communication and relating to others by observing the adults around her.

We cannot 'not' communicate. We do it by our presence and by our absence, by our silences as well as our words, by our choices, gestures and attitudes. We may not always do it well, but we always do it. (Unknown)

Is Erin being difficult or is she experiencing difficulties?

As an example of a young child with speech and language problems, you may want to think about Erin's experiences of a day in your setting. Does the ethos and organization of the setting mean that her needs are being met? Are the activities being differentiated and are there, for example, visual prompts to help her navigate her way around?

Is Erin able to make choices in her learning and are there routines in place so that she is becoming more confident and familiar with them?

Does her key person have realistic expectations of what she can and can't do, based on knowledge of child development and the EYFS?

Does Erin show any indications of feeling part of a community and how can you help her to interact with other children and make choices in her learning?

Does her key person understand her particular areas of difficulty and know strategies to support her and her parents? Erin may be at risk of switching off because she can't understand or communicate.

Activity:

Think about a child you are responsible for and consider the following:

- How do you speak about her and to her? If she is struggling with verbal communication, she may be looking more closely than you realize to try and work out what you mean by how you are saying it rather than what you are saying. Your body language may be expressing more than you would like it to! Be aware of whether what you are saying matches how you look. You may intend your words to be calm, but your facial expression or body language may be giving a contradictory message.
- Do you model and encourage good listening skills?
- How often do you smile and acknowledge the child positively?
- How much time do you spend communicating with the child? How could you improve this?

- Do you place enough emphasis on listening rather than talking, waiting rather than anticipating and prompting too quickly?
- When do you need to support the child most and which activities does she enjoy most?
- How well do you think you communicate with her parents: is the communication open, inclusive and well-managed?

Positive Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Children who are experiencing difficulties with speech, language and communication may struggle to express their feelings and to understand how to communicate their needs to others. This in turn can have a significant effect on their ability to build good relationships with others and to use social skills effectively. Communication and behaviour problems are often found together. It's important to think about how these affect one another when looking for ways to improve a child's daily experiences as behaviour is a form of communication which we can interpret.

Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) underpins all aspects of a child's experiences and development. They are seen by the DCSF as three building blocks of future successes in life and they form one of the six areas of learning and development. They are closely linked to each other and consist of:

- Self awareness: understanding who we are.
- Social awareness: understanding ourselves in relation to others.
- Emotional awareness: understanding our own feelings and those of others.

This is seen as such a high priority that the Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on local authorities (LAs) with their partners in settings 'to improve the well-being of all young children in their area and to reduce the inequalities between them'. (Source: DCSF: Social and Emotional Aspects of Development: Guidance for EYFS practitioners: 2008 00707-2008BKT-EN)

Self-esteem

If a child is struggling to communicate with others for whatever reason, they are less likely to develop self-confidence and to be able to make friendships with others.

Self-esteem refers to how we feel about ourselves and whether this is positive or negative. Children who have low self-esteem are more likely to have negative feelings about themselves and there is evidence

that older primary aged children with SLCN see themselves more negatively in terms of how well they do in school, how well they are accepted socially, and how they behave. Although this may not seem so apparent in younger children, it is disturbing to think of the consequences of long-term language difficulties which are not resolved.

The key-person approach helps children to settle in their setting and provides consistent care and emotional support to enable the child to 'blossom'. The EYFS stresses that it is now a specific legal requirement for each child to be assigned a key person. In childminding settings this is the childminder.

Some of the areas that the key person will be significant in delivering are:

- Ensuring that the child feels safe both physically and emotionally, and is helped to make secure attachments.
- Helping the child feel that they belong by having routines and rituals, for example, welcome and departure songs and greetings.
- Helping children to label and recognize their feelings.
- Helping children to cope with their fears and anxieties.

Summary

The impact of SLCN can be felt across a wide range of areas:

- Literacy: Difficulties with reading and spelling, as well as difficulty in ordering thoughts and using appropriate grammar and content.
- Learning: Much information is communicated verbally and this means children will experience difficulties with understanding and acquiring vocabulary and concepts, such as shape and number.
- Social Interaction: Children can become fearful, shy and unwilling to build social relationships and friendships. They experience difficulties with understanding the thoughts and feelings of others and may upset other children by their inappropriate use of language. They may be wrongly labeled as behaviour problems if they seem consistently to ignore instructions given to groups of children. They may withdraw and this kind of behaviour may be missed because the child isn't making a fuss. This can be a cause of concern and is often a strategy that girls may use.