



Young People with Speech, Language and Communication Needs

***An Indicators Checklist, Possible Causes and Practical
Supporting Strategies for Non Specialists***

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Afasic England – unlocking speech and language

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Contents

	Page
Introduction	4
Indicators checklist	9
Possible behaviours, causes and ways to support	
Receptive language difficulties	12
Expressive language difficulties	16
Social use of language difficulty	20
Appendices	
1 Narrative frameworks	23
2 Annoyed scale	24
Bibliography	26
About Afasic	27

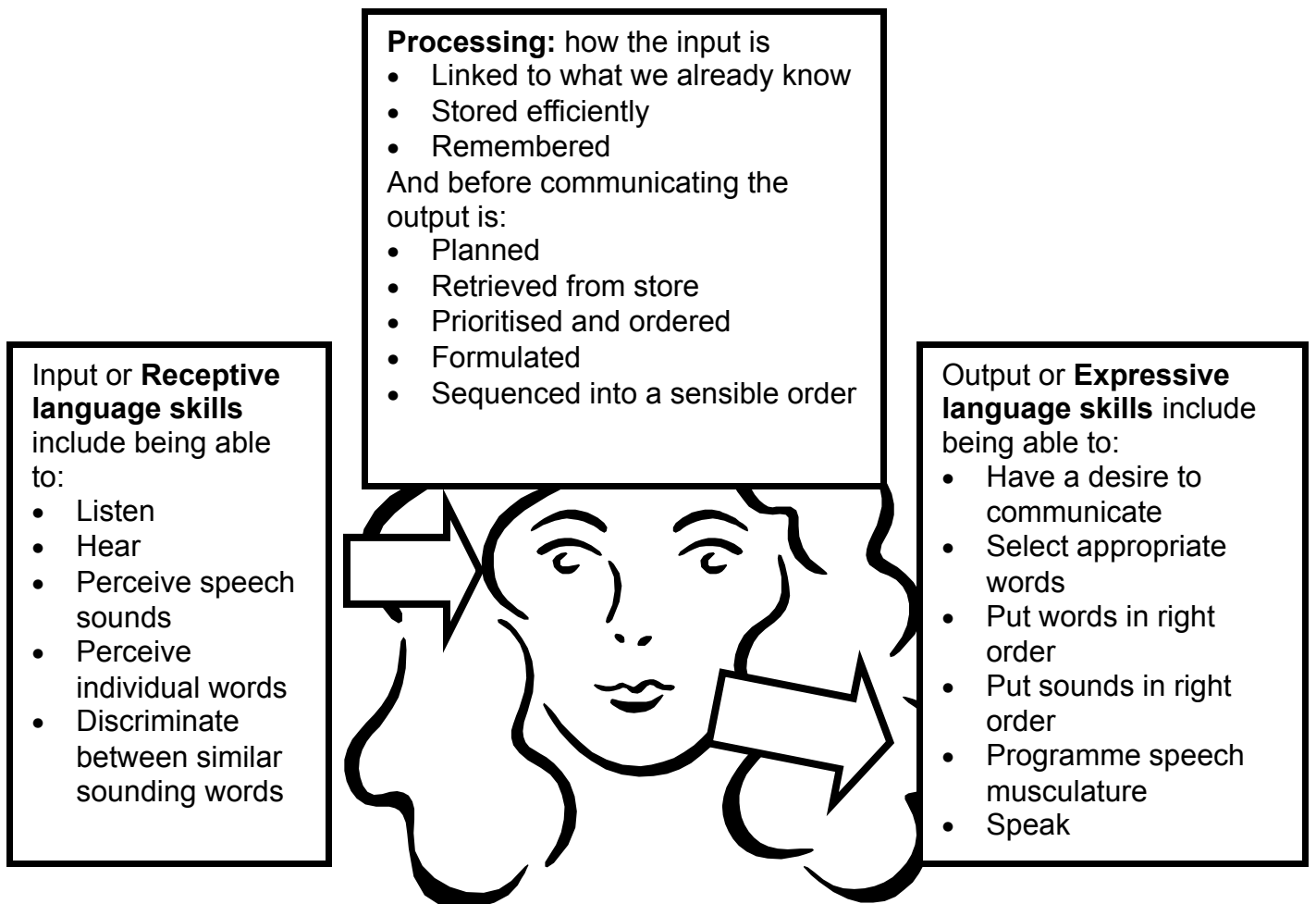
Introduction

This Afasic publication centres on a resource designed to help non-specialist staff (youth workers, teachers, teaching assistants etc) get useful information about Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) in the young people they work with. Before moving on to the checklist and accompanying ideas for how to support, this introductory section is designed to provide a brief overview of the terms used in the resource.

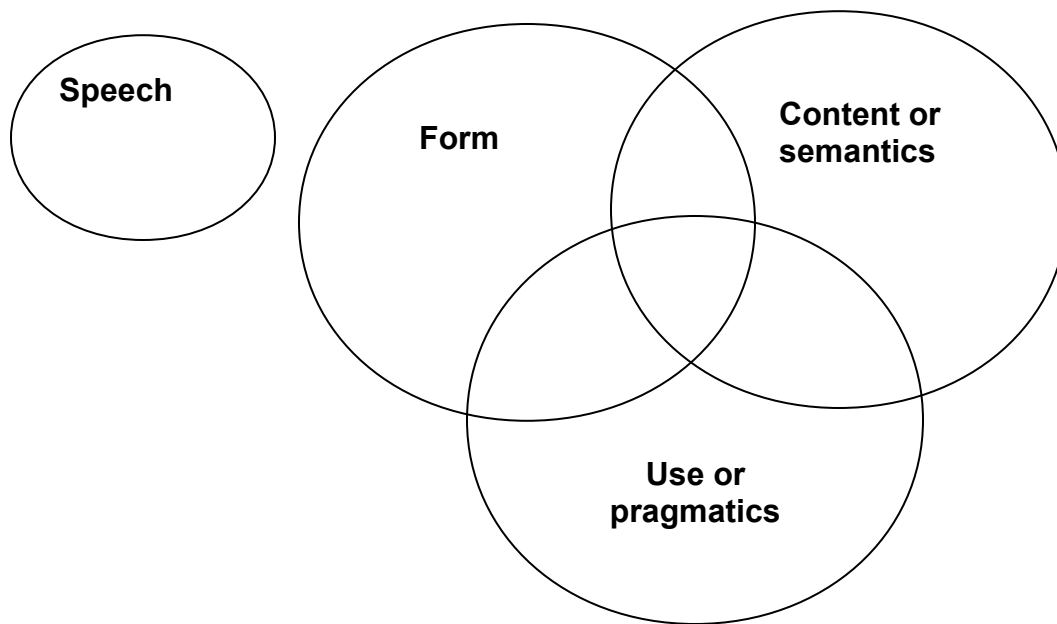
What is Speech and Language?

- Very simply, **speech** is how we make or articulate sounds and how we put these sounds together to make words using our mouth, lips, vocal cords, tongue and breath. It is concerned with physiological processes. It is a way of communicating language.
- **Language** is a system of sounds and words that convey meaning. It includes understanding, (receptive language), and expression - through spoken words or signing, or writing, or an electronic communicator (expressive language).
- In every aspect of a teenager's life, language is the main vehicle for providing information, asking questions, making demands and for the social relationships on which all of these activities are based. Language is central to all teaching and learning.
- Because language is generally taken for granted, it will be useful to look at it using two different models which will help us understand how it works and what can go wrong with it

Model 1: The 'Communication chain' model



Model 2: The Interaction of Form, Content and Use of language (Bloom & Lahey, 1978)



This is another way of describing the different components of language and splits language into 3 overlapping components.

Speech is separate – concerned with the mechanics of speech production.

Language Form

This is the way in spoken language that sounds are joined together to make words, and words together to make sentences. And then sentences into longer stretches of spoken narrative.

Symbols and letters are the equivalent in written language.

Gestures and signs are the equivalent in signed language.

In spoken language, children learn a system of rules governing how sounds and words can go together. It is concerned with the structure and grammar of language

Phonology (The speech sound system of a particular language - which sounds and combinations of sounds are used and permitted sound system)

Syntax (The way words combine in phrases and sentences grammatically, e.g. subject - verb - object (the cat caught the mouse)),

Morphology (The grammatical rules applying to words and parts of words, e.g. the dog's bones)

Language Content or Semantics

A young person may be able to put together complex sentences, very clearly (the Form aspects) – but for it to make sense, young people must also be competent in the area of language Content.

Content relates to meaning, ideas and concepts

This is all semantic information: our knowledge of words and how they relate to each other.

Other aspects of language that come into 'content':

- Vocabulary, including knowing that words can have more than one meaning
- Idioms, figurative language, double meanings, jokes using word play
- Reasoning, inference

Language Use or Pragmatics

This covers all the non-verbal aspects of language including

- Turn-taking, eye contact, proximity etc.
- Conversational skills - starting, maintaining and finishing conversations
- Social interaction – the unwritten rules
- Forming and keeping relationships
- Knowing when and how to interrupt and change topic
- Making sense of situations using the context (knowing that if someone comments on how hot the room is while you're standing by the window, they're suggesting that you could open the window)
- Using the right style (or register) of speech for a given situation (knowing that you talk to the Headteacher in a different way to what you use with your mates)

Input/output in each circle of Model 2

There is an input and output component to each part of language:

- You understand and produce different sentence forms
- You understand and produce vocabulary
- You understand as well as produce the social rules of communication

Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) vary greatly between different individuals and between different types of Special Educational Need. Language difficulties can occur in all, or only some of the areas explained in the two models above. SLCN can affect any point along the process described in the Communication Chain (model 1), and / or different components in the venn diagram (model 2), e.g. Asperger Syndrome is associated with strengths in Form, but difficulties in Semantics and Pragmatics.

Although language difficulties are often separated into **Receptive** or **Expressive difficulties**, generally, children and young people with SLCN will experience difficulties in both receptive and expressive aspects of language, to varying degrees.

Some terms used to describe different types of SLCN:

Speech and / or Language Delay. Here a child follows the normal pattern for developing speech and language but at a slower rate. They may be behind in one or more areas of language and show skills similar to those of a younger child. Skills continue to develop but at a slower rate.

Speech, Language and Communication Impairment or Disorder. A young person with a speech or language disorder has an unusual pattern of development. Although all areas of language may be affected, it is likely that one area of language will be more severely affected than the others. Whereas a child with a language delay may pick up language skills along the way, children with disordered language need targeted and structured input to develop skills

Specific Language Impairment (SLI). Here the young person has average or above cognitive skills, but significant difficulties in areas of language: their difficulties are specific to their language skills. A child with SLI often presents with a 'spikey' profile on different tests and tasks - achieving high scores in some activities and very low scores in other, language related areas

Slow processing in which all the stages listed in the Communication Chain (Model 1) are achieved, but take considerably longer. This can lead to spoken responses to questions taking several seconds, instead of the instantaneous response adults generally expect during conversational exchanges.

Indicators checklist for Speech, Language and Communication Needs, combining possible causes of the difficulties and ways to support

Suitable for: This resource is designed for the use of adults working with young people covering an age range from approx 10yrs to 17yrs. Although most of the contexts for the types of difficulty and ways to support are selected from the perspective of voluntary or employed youth workers, staff supporting young people in school (particularly Teaching Assistants) should also find the resource useful.

About this resource:

Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) are very diverse, affecting different young people in entirely dissimilar ways. Therefore, it is vital that an adult supporting a young person whom they suspect has difficulties in this area, begins by considering carefully which aspects of the young person's language are affected.

This resource is designed to enable the user to use the 'Indicators checklist' (on the first three pages), to highlight the young person's areas of difficulty before moving on to the following section in which this checklist is combined with suggested causes and strategies. It is likely that the indicators highlighted by you will fall into more than one category, but at this initial stage a pattern of difficulties may begin to emerge. For example, the difficulties may form particular clusters in the categories of receptive language and social use of language / pragmatics. Or use of the checklist may prompt an awareness of difficulties with receptive language when previously only expressive difficulties had been noticed. These investigations should include the experiences of other adults, (including family), in contact with the young person. We strongly recommend the involvement of the local Speech and Language Therapy Service throughout this process of identifying a young person's difficulties and deciding on appropriate support.

Alongside the areas of difficulty highlighted in the checklist column, possible causes of these problems are supplied in the middle column. The list of reasons are intended as a guide only and in this context cannot be considered exhaustive - there may be other causes apart from those provided, which have given rise to the SLCN. This aspect of the resource is not intended to be used as a diagnostic tool, but as a first step towards building a clear picture of what is giving rise to the young person's SLCN.

The third column, entitled 'Strategies / ways to support', provides corresponding ideas for ways to support the young person facing the highlighted difficulties. Once again, the strategies mentioned are just a few from a possible range, but should offer some starting points with which to offer help.

How the resource is sequenced:

Receptive language difficulties (problems with input of language) including

- Understanding long or complex instructions
- Difficulties understanding figurative / non-literal language / what is inferred
- Difficulty learning new words
- Literacy difficulties
- Behaviour difficulties

Expressive language difficulties (problems with output of language) including

- Difficulty producing clear speech
- Difficulty producing clear language

Social use of language difficulty (pragmatics)

- Difficulty with conversational rules
- Difficulty with non-verbal aspects of communication

Name of young person being assessed	
Name of person carrying out assessment	
Date	
Indicators checklist	✓ if this is a problem
Receptive language difficulties: understanding long or complex instructions	
Appears to forget what's just been said	
May take a long time to respond to instructions given to a whole group. Tends to hang back and watch what others do instead of relying on what has been said	
Understands more if talking alone to an adult, instead of in a group	
Quick at carrying out familiar tasks but takes lots of time to learn a new series of instructions, or way of doing things	
May respond to only part of the message or instruction. Particularly noticeable with a long instruction containing lots of bits of information. May only remember first three bits of a chain of instructions and appear to ignore the rest	
May become distracted during long explanations or find ways to be elsewhere, e.g. through misbehaviour	
Seems lost, or gives up during verbally interactive games or group activities	
May not pay attention to instructions given to a group, even though the young person can listen and understand when delivered individually	
May be overly passive during communication, not willing to seek clarification when they haven't understood	
May appear to ignore a question completely or take a long time to respond	
Receptive language difficulties continued: difficulties understanding figurative / non-literal language / what is inferred	
Responds inappropriately to abstract language (e.g. 'pull your socks up' leads to young person adjusting their socks). Very literal interpretation	
Seems to miss or ignore what should be obvious (e.g. 'it's really cold out there' meaning 'take your coat')	
Young person may not understand implied requests, appearing lazy or defiant. (e.g. Adult: "Could you put the equipment away?" Young person's response: "Yes" without doing what has been asked)	
Receptive language difficulties continued: difficulty learning new words	
Seems to quickly forget new words	
Receptive language difficulties continued: literacy difficulties	

May have problems with reading / decoding text	
May have difficulties with reading comprehension - being able to understand and remember what they have read. Particular problems with 'reading between the lines'	
Receptive language difficulties continued: behaviour difficulties	
May internalise frustration with own language difficulties and withdraw, or externalise frustration and display anger or poor behaviour	
Expressive language difficulties: difficulty producing clear speech	
Understanding the young person's speech may be difficult, particularly for those unfamiliar with them.	
May leave out part of a word and / or tend to abbreviate multisyllabic words (e.g. reciprocal = recipicker), or use one sound (phoneme) in place of other (e.g. confusing k / t sounds)	
Confusion with sound components of words (phonemes) leads to problems with literacy and particularly with spelling	
Speech may be too quick causing confusion for listener	
May stammer (e.g. hesitate during speech, several attempts to form certain words, seize up, change track to avoid difficult sounds, display facial tension during speech)	
Expressive language difficulties continued: difficulty producing clear language	
Makes use of a lot fewer words than their peers. Increased use of words such as 'thing' or 'stuff' rather than specific words for precise descriptions	
May use the wrong words for things, e.g. a word that is related in meaning (slippers / sandals), or a made up word (can-screwdriver for tin opener), or one that has a similar sound (discriminate / disintegrate)	
When describing something, they use lots of fillers: "um, er, whatever", pauses, gestures, and struggling to find the right word. Can result in lots of swear words being used.	
The young person's language sounds 'immature' - like that of a much younger child, e.g. " <u>and</u> he hitted the ball <u>and</u> it went really far, <u>and</u> then"	
May respond to a question in a confusing way - by seeming to ignore what has been asked, answering inappropriately or talking about something unconnected	
The young person may struggle to organise longer strings of information e.g. if telling you about something that happened – they might not put things into context, say who was there or where they were. Instead, may just launch into various disconnected aspects without any sense of logical development	
In retelling incidents, stories or what happened in a film etc, is likely to make fewer references to others' emotional states or motivation. Likely to stick to describing what could be seen	
Difficulties evident in the young person's use of spoken language are also noticeable in their written language	
Uses clear, well formed sentences, but interaction seems empty of meaning. Leaves you with a feeling of 'what was that all about?'	

<p>Their conversation over uses chunks of learned 'scripts' , e.g. everyday niceties used automatically, cartoon dialogue, snippets of film or music lyrics</p>	
<p>Tends to be withdrawn in formal groupings, despite talking happily in 1:1 or casual settings. When in situation requiring language skills beyond their ability, can become frustrated and angry</p>	
<p>Behavioural difficulties emerge in group discussions or other situations where they are expected to talk more formally</p>	
<p>Social use of language difficulty (pragmatics): difficulty with conversational rules</p>	
<p>Finds it difficult to take turns appropriately during conversation</p>	
<p>Makes awkward interruptions while others are speaking</p>	
<p>Is unable to vary style of language (register) according to the situation - may talk to a person in authority as if chatting to a peer, or talk to a peer in an overly formal way</p>	
<p>In conversation, shows little awareness of what the listener is interested in – it might feel like the young people is talking 'at' rather than 'to' or 'with' you.</p>	
<p>May tend to talk about the same topic despite others' obvious disinterest</p>	
<p>During conversation, does not pick up on the meaning behind others' facial expressions or tone of voice. Will not use these appropriately when talking</p>	
<p>Social use of language difficulty (pragmatics) continued: difficulty with non-verbal aspects of communication</p>	
<p>The young person has difficulty producing signs that they are attending and listening (looking at speaker, nodding, mirroring body language, etc) during interaction</p>	
<p>The young person is overly reliant on adult support, tending to avoid peers.</p>	
<p>Poor eye contact –the young person might avoid eye contact completely when speaking or listening</p>	
<p>The young person may stand too close or too far away, may shy away from even slight physical contact</p>	
<p>Often involved in arguments or is considered odd and avoided by their peers</p>	

Indicators checklist Possible behaviours associated with this difficulty	Possible causes	Strategies Ways to support. The young person may need ...
Receptive language difficulties		
Understanding long or complex instructions		
<p>Appears to forget what's just been said</p>	<p>Doesn't understand complex sentences with, e.g. 'if', 'when', 'so', etc. or those with embedded clauses, e.g. "when we finish here, <u>after this bunch have cleared up</u>, I'll explain what you need to do".</p> <p>Likely to have difficulties understanding unfamiliar vocabulary</p> <p>Likely to have reduced capacity in auditory memory - may only be able to retain a few key bits of information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow down your rate of talking and simplify the way you present information. Supply a visual reminder of what is said (written text, symbols, cartoon strip etc) • Present the 'big picture' first and why the information is useful, before going into details • Instructions broken down into manageable chunks • Pause between items of information and ask young people what they think will come next. • Use 'wave method' of giving instructions: explain A, then get young person or peers to practice or recap A, then explain B and young person or peers practice or recap AB, then explain C, practice / recap ABC, etc • Play games based on 'I went to the shops and bought a' with young people adding other items to make longer strings of information to remember
<p>May take a long time to respond to instructions given to a whole group. Tends to hang back and watch what others do instead of relying on what has been said</p>	<p>Likely to have difficulty recalling instructions in correct order leading to organisational problems</p> <p>Likely to 'switch off' during long instructions due to past experience of failure to understand</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage a 'buddy' system where a young person has a partner who will give them discreet prompts when they're unsure • Supply the young person with things they could say when they're not sure or want some help • Visual support with remembering - write instructions or use memory jogging symbols in the order of what needs to be done
<p>Understands more if talking alone to an adult, instead of in a group</p>	<p>Intelligent young people with SLCN will often use all the non-verbal clues effectively to pick up on what is happening, but struggle with new, spoken instructions</p>	
<p>Quick at carrying out familiar tasks but takes lots of time to learn a new series of instructions, or way of doing things</p>		<p>Individual recap of instructions for new activities, with an opportunity to repeat back what needs to be done</p>

<p>May respond to only part of the message or instruction. Particularly noticeable with a long instruction containing lots of bits of information. May only remember first three bits of a chain of instructions and appear to ignore the rest</p>	<p>May not pick up on what seems obvious to others. Needs to have the implicit made explicit. <i>Associated with conditions such as Asperger Syndrome (AS) / Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check understanding and recall of what has been said • Prompts from adults to support recall (visual reminder, etc) • Develop strategies to support recall (using visualizations, mnemonics, involving other senses, etc.) • Practice remembering gradually increased items of information in one instruction • Introduce delays between giving an instruction and the young person carrying it out (in 5 minutes, tomorrow, next week)
<p>May become distracted during long explanations or find ways to be elsewhere, e.g. through misbehaviour</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let the young person know what support is available - avoid making them tackle a language task which they cannot achieve • Try to position the young person away from people or things which distract • Teach the desired behaviour, e.g. 'say: explain that bit again please' instead of 'don't say: I'm bored' • Encourage self-monitoring by the young person
<p>Seems lost, or gives up during games or group activities</p>		<p>Support difficulties understanding rules of (new) games and activities by clarifying rules before the activity.</p>
<p>May not pay attention to instructions given to a group, even though the young person can listen and understand when delivered individually</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young person may not consider that instructions to a group are meant for them too. <i>Associated with conditions such as Asperger Syndrome (AS) / Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a cue before starting the instruction: "James, are you listening ? ..." • Break information down into manageable chunks • Encourage the young person to ask questions (suggest how to phrase) when unsure • Praise others who ask questions
<p>May be overly passive during communication, not willing to seek clarification when they haven't understood</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May result from the feeling of always being confused when exposed to complex language. • Embarrassed to draw attention to their difficulty 	<p>Role play with another adult what to do / say when you need help because, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone speaks too quietly • The message is unclear • The message is too long • The message contains difficult vocabulary, etc
<p>May appear to ignore a question</p>	<p>May have slow processing leading</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the young person time to respond, avoiding following

completely or take a long time to respond	to a need for extra time to understand what has been said and formulate a response	up with a rephrased version of the question - this may not be understood and leave the young person feeling that they have been asked a second question <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the amount / complexity of information given at one time
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Receptive language difficulties continued

Difficulties understanding figurative / non-literal language / what is inferred

Responds inappropriately to abstract language (e.g. 'pull your socks up' leads to young person adjusting their socks). Very literal interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tendency to take a very literal interpretation of what is said, and have difficulty reading between the lines / inferring meaning that is not spelt out clearly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific work on what idioms mean • Build an understanding in the young person that it is their responsibility to say when they haven't understood.
Seems to ignore what should be obvious (e.g. 'it's really cold out there' meaning 'take your coat')	<p><i>Associated with conditions such as Asperger Syndrome (AS) / Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice with 'If then I need to' Young person completes sentence, e.g. 'If it's my mum's birthday tomorrow, then I need to ...' 'If I want my friends to come to my house, then I need to ...' Etc • Games involving inference, e.g. "there was broken glass on the kitchen floor and the radio was missing. What had happened?" • Games involving deduction, e.g. "I have three hands and a face. I'm worn on your arm. What am I?"
Young person may not understand implied requests, appearing lazy or defiant. (e.g. Adult: "Could you put the equipment away?" Young person's response: "Yes" without doing what has been asked)		Clear guidance about what is expected from this type of question. Practise different versions

Receptive language difficulties continued

Difficulty learning new words

Seems to quickly forget new words	Processing difficulties lead to problems storing accurate representations of new words (may have a relative strength / weakness in either phonological (links to what it sounds like) or semantic (links to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-teach new vocabulary before the young person encounters the words during an instruction • Provide opportunities to hear and see new words on several occasions • Link new words to what they mean; other similar sounding
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	what it means) aspects of word learning)	words; how they could be used in a sentence, what they rhyme with etc, using mind-map type diagrams
Receptive language difficulties continued		
Literacy difficulties		
May have problems with reading / decoding text	May have difficulties with phonological awareness - processing the component sounds in words, and relating these to graphemes (written representations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break down words into their component sounds • Provide opportunities to hear and see new words on several occasions • Consider a phonics based literacy programme
May have difficulties with reading comprehension - being able to understand and remember what they have read. Particular problems with 'reading between the lines'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties with understanding what has been read, processing it into memory, and retrieving it temporarily to relate to new information leads to poor comprehension • May be able decode text at a shallow 'mechanical' level, without a matching ability to understand what has been read <i>Associated with conditions such as Asperger Syndrome (AS) / Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Down's Syndrome</i> 	<p>Cartooning: get young person to draw the six (?) main events in a chapter, story, event or incident. Include thought bubbles. Order into formal narrative / chronological structure and discuss how characters may have said one thing but thought something else, etc.</p> <p>Using written language can be very helpful for developing a young person's difficulties with inference because it is fixed and enables them to take time to work out connections</p>
Receptive language difficulties continued		
Behaviour difficulties		
May internalise frustration with own language difficulties and withdraw, or externalise frustration and display anger or poor behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience of repeated failure leads to low self esteem • Young people with language difficulties often fail to develop 'inner speech' to regulate behaviour and emotions <p>Language difficulties lead to problems with expressing, understanding and recognizing emotions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for the young person to display their strengths • Develop the young person's awareness that their difficulty arises from an aspect of language - not stupidity • Help the young person to become aware of their own emotional signals e.g. What are the signs that their frustration is building up to an outburst? What should they do when they become aware of these signs?
Indicators checklist		Strategies

Possible behaviours associated with this difficulty	Possible causes	Ways to support. The young person may need ...
Expressive language difficulties		
Difficulty producing clear speech		
Understanding the young person's speech may be difficult, particularly for those unfamiliar with them.	May have an underlying physical difficulty with speech production, (using the mouth, lips, vocal cords, palette, tongue and breath).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let the young person know that you want to understand them and help them get the message across • Admit that you have not understood everything the young person has said, and ask them to help you understand. • Repeat the child's sentence 'correctly' to clarify that you have understood
May leave out part of a word and / or tend to abbreviate multisyllabic words (e.g. reciprocal = recipicker), or use one sound (phoneme) in place of other (e.g. confusing k / t sounds)	Difficulty with hearing the difference between individual speech sounds, being aware of the sounds in words and how words are made up (Problems with phonological awareness/phonetic knowledge)	
Confusion with sound components of words (phonemes) leads to problems with literacy and particularly with spelling	The young person's disordered phonological system leads to problems with recognising and reproducing individual sounds (e.g. 's' and 't') in clusters ('st') and sequences (east / eats)	A phonics based literacy programme will support development of accurate spelling skills
Speech may be too quick causing confusion for listener	As above, or Young person may not be aware of a listener's needs	Provide clear feedback about why it is difficult to understand the young person, and how they can help you.
May stammer (e.g. hesitate during speech, several attempts to form certain words, seize up, change track to avoid difficult sounds, display facial tension during speech)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have a word finding difficulty • There is no clear point at which speech dysfluency turns into a stammer and causes are still poorly understood • <i>Also associated with conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)</i> <i>Up to 26% of children diagnosed with ADHD have difficulties with</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't look away from the young person when they're stammering • Don't finish off what they're trying to say, and discourage peers from doing so • Give them time to finish • Stay calm and slow down your own rate of talking to reduce pressure on the young person • Help the young person avoid situations in which they have the most difficulty

	<p><i>stuttering (a breakdown in the normal time pattern and fluency of speech marked by prolongations, repetitions, broken words or words produced with significant stress)</i></p>	
<p>Expressive language difficulties continued</p>		
<p>Difficulty producing clear language</p>		
<p>Makes use of a lot fewer words than their peers. Increased use of words such as ‘thing’ or ‘stuff’ rather than specific words for precise descriptions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties acquiring new words lead to reduced vocabulary • Young person’s environment may not have exposed them to a wide vocabulary - few opportunities to learn or use new words • The young person may have a ‘word finding difficulty’: because of the way, in which they ‘store’ new words, may not be able to ‘find’ words they know quite well. They may have that “tip of the tongue” experience where you know a word, but just can’t think of it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supply new words which are able to express the young person’s ideas more accurately • To prompt recall of words use ‘cueing’: semantic cueing relates to the word’s meaning. E.g. “What does the thing do?”, “Where would you find it?” Phonological cueing relates to the word’s sound, e.g. “Is it a long or short word”, “The word starts with a sw sound” etc • Encourage the young person to instruct others in how to carry out an activity. First note the words that the young person is avoiding, then practice their use, then include them in the instruction. Extra support could be provided by first sketching reminders in the form of a simple cartoon strip including key words
<p>May use the wrong words for things, e.g. a word that is related in meaning (slippers / sandals), or a made up word (can-screw for tin opener), or one that has a similar sound (discriminate / disintegrate)</p>		
<p>When describing something, they use lots of fillers: “um, er, whatever”, pauses, gestures, and struggling to find the right word. Can result in lots of swear words being used.</p>		
<p>The young person’s language sounds ‘immature’ - like that of a much younger child, e.g. “<u>and</u> he hit the ball <u>and</u> it went really far, <u>and</u> then”</p>	<p>Difficulties acquiring complex sentence structures can lead to over reliance on ‘and ...and ..’ <i>Often associated with low intelligence</i></p>	<p>Discreetly model more appropriate ways to formulate the sentence: “Yes he hit the ball really hard and it went miles, so John had to go and look for it”</p>

<p>May respond to a question in a confusing way - by seeming to ignore what has been asked, answering inappropriately or talking about something unconnected</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty distinguishing terms such as ‘when, where, why, who, whose, which, how, etc’ or other terms used in the question • May be unable to suppress their own interest in a different topic, leading them to ignore what has been asked <i>Associated with conditions such as Asperger Syndrome (AS) / Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear guidance about why the response was inappropriate and clarification (if necessary) about question form terms • Support confusion about the subject of the question by e.g. supplying a visual timetable • Explain to the young person that it is their responsibility to seek clarification when unsure <p>Explain that you are not willing to talk about the other topic at this time because you’re busy, but are willing to arrange a conversation at a more appropriate occasion</p>
<p>The young person may struggle to organise longer strings of information e.g. if telling you about something that happened – they might not put things into context, say who was there or where they were, instead just launch into various disconnected aspects without any sense of logical development</p> <p>In retelling incidents, stories or what happened in a film etc, is likely to make fewer references to others’ emotional states or motivation. Likely to stick to describing what could be seen</p>	<p>‘Narrative’ difficulties arise when a young person has a general idea of what happened, but problems with formulating a description involving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting the scene (where, who, when? Etc) • ideas of cause and effect • often leave out characters • emotional reactions • chronological progression • a conclusion <p>The young person’s environment may not have provided sufficient opportunities to become aware of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain what a ‘formal narrative structure’ involves (setting the scene, starts at the beginning and goes to the end in chronological order. Compare to ‘casual narrative structure’ told in non-chronological order, (begins with the end of the story first or the part of the story with the greatest emotional intensity. Story is told in episodes) • Use narrative frameworks (like a cartoon strip but with boxes empty except for simple word cues suggesting what should go in each box) and visual organisers to show patterns of formal narrative structure (<i>see appendix 1 for an example</i>) • Tell stories both ways. Discuss what’s the same and what’s different. • Cartooning: get young person to draw the six (?) main events in a story, event or incident. Include thought bubbles. Order into formal narrative structure

<p>Difficulties evident in the young person's use of spoken language are also noticeable in their written language</p>	<p>and practice a formal style of explaining their ideas</p> <p><i>Also associated with conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) The language of young people with ADHD is more likely to involve 'mazes', where they start an utterance, use 'fillers' like um and er, repeat things, change what they're saying, and then maybe abandon it.</i></p>	<p>Supporting a young person's difficulty with aspects of writing will help with associated problems with talking and vice versa. In the teen years, reading is the most significant factor through which language skills are improved.</p>
<p>Uses clear, well formed sentences, but interaction seems empty of meaning. Leaves you with a feeling of 'what was that all about?'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have 'absorbed' language at a very surface level from other sources (e.g. cartoons, films, instruction manuals etc) without understanding it, and regurgitated it in conversation. • May not be aware of a listener's needs - how much detail / relevance? • <i>Associated with conditions such as Asperger Syndrome (AS) / Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)</i> 	<p>Provide clear guidance about how much information a listener needs (too much / too little) in order to understand but not get bored</p> <p>Help the young person to develop strategies involving useful phrases to use during conversation, e.g. "I sometimes go on a bit about ... so let me know if it gets boring"</p> <p>'Barrier games' involving taking turns to e.g. provide details about a picture from one side of a barrier to someone attempting to reproduce the picture without seeing it while seated on the other side. The young person with difficulties can be encouraged to think about how best to provide the information that their partner needs</p>
<p>Their conversation over uses chunks of learned 'scripts', e.g. everyday niceties used automatically, cartoon dialogue, snippets of film or music lyrics</p>		
<p>Tends to be withdrawn in formal groupings, despite talking happily in 1:1 or casual settings. When in situation requiring language skills beyond their ability, can become frustrated and angry</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people are often are very aware of their difficulties and can develop low self-esteem. They may try to disguise their difficulties by avoiding situations which will draw attention to them, or over use well practised phrases. • Finds it hard to express emotions verbally - understands simple happy / sad distinction but is 	

Behavioural difficulties emerge in group discussions or other situations where they are expected to talk more formally	unclear about states and terms in between.	Understanding abstract concepts is often a significant problem for young people with language difficulties. Emotions are the most difficult and are often reduced to simple happy / sad extremes. Help young people understand and name their full, complex range of emotions through using visual numbered scales with e.g. degrees of being angry, associated descriptions ('a bit flat', 'miffed' etc through to 'angry' 'furious') and possible causes of each state (<i>see appendix 2 for an example</i>)
Indicators checklist Possible behaviours associated with this difficulty	Possible causes	Strategies Ways to support. The young person may need ...
Social use of language difficulty (pragmatics)		
Difficulty with conversational rules		
Finds it difficult to take turns appropriately during conversation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty picking up rules of conversation and how they change depending on situation (football game / classroom) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the rules of conversation (one person speaks at a time, others listen and look at speaker, speaker talks about what's interesting for the listener, take turns, non verbal aspects) • Explain how to signal that you want a turn (looking at the speaker, nodding, waiting for a pause, opening phrases, etc). Provide tips on polite ways to interrupt
Makes awkward interruptions while others are speaking		
Is unable to vary style of language (register) according to the situation - may talk to a person in authority as if chatting to a peer, or talk to a peer in an overly formal way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not be able to understand and use listener feedback (looking bored, affronted, eager to contribute, etc) to adjust their conversation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-direct the young person's focus and stop them when they've given enough information • Use role play / drama to explain listener feedback to watch out for (looking away, trying to introduce a new topic, etc)
In conversation, shows little awareness of what the listener is interested in – it might feel like the young people is talking 'at' rather than 'to' or 'with' you.		

<p>May tend to talk about the same topic despite others' obvious disinterest</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have difficulties with aspects of Theory of Mind - understanding facial expressions, being able to see things from another's point of view. <i>Associated with conditions such as Asperger Syndrome (AS) / Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the young person to use phrases in their conversation e.g. "I always talk about computers, so let me know if you get bored" or "I love computers, what do you like?"
<p>During conversation, does not pick up on the meaning behind others' facial expressions or tone of voice. Will not use these appropriately when talking</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at short excerpts from soap operas and discuss what different expressions mean, why characters reacted in certain ways • Make a scrap book with photos of different expressions, label what they mean and how to react if you see this expression

Social use of language difficulty (pragmatics) continued


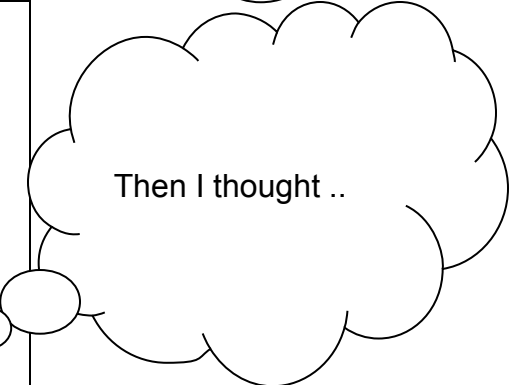
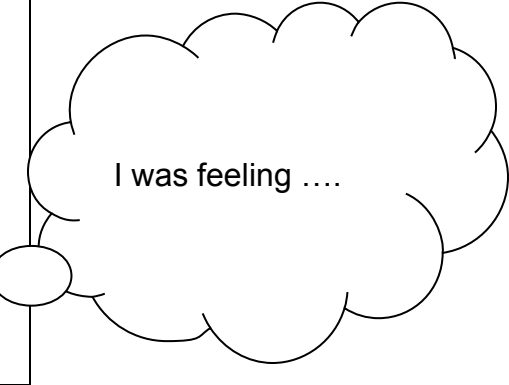
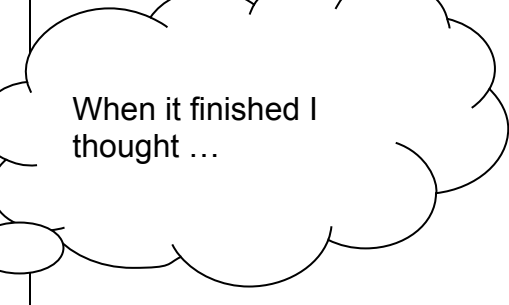
Difficulty with non-verbal aspects of communication

<p>The young person has difficulty producing signs that they are attending and listening (looking at speaker, nodding, mirroring body language, etc) during interaction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeated experience of failure to understand leads to reluctance to engage in difficult communication • Young person's environment may not have provided suitable opportunities for attending appropriately • <i>Also associated with conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). ADHD features include various aspects of pragmatic use of language ("doesn't seem to listen", "difficulty in listening when spoken to", "talks excessively", "interrupts others often")</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be careful to distinguish between misbehaviour and misunderstanding. • Make clear what behaviours you expect when you are speaking to the young person • Try to be calm and consistent (don't ignore a behaviour one day and challenge it another) • Praise the young person when they produce behaviours you want to encourage • Develop discreet signals that you can use to let the young person know when they need to adjust their behaviour • Encourage the young person to use positive self-talk (encouraging phrases spoken to yourself, e.g. "Stay cool, I can handle this") • Make the young person aware of external signs you notice when they are becoming unsettled, so that they can begin to self-monitor • Arrange breaks involving vigorous exercise • Arrange a strategy (time out ?) which the young person can use within a framework of rules, when they are unable to manage in a group
<p>The young person is overly reliant on adult support, tending to avoid peers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peers are less tolerant of the young person's difficulty / consider them odd • Adults' language is easier to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide structured opportunities for the young person to interact with peers during games, exercises, projects etc • Supply a script / use role play to explain how the young person can join in with peers' activities

	<p>understand than peers'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young person may have been bullied in the past leading to wariness about any approaches by peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider discussing with the young person and their parents about explaining their difficulties to a selected group of their peers, so that they are able to understand and support appropriately
<p>Poor eye contact –the young person might avoid eye contact completely when speaking or listening</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Associated with conditions such as Asperger Syndrome (AS) / Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)</i> 	<p>If the difficulty is associated with ASD, do not attempt to develop this skill on its own. Explain why it is useful during conversation as a way of getting information about what the other person is thinking (are they interested, do they understand?)</p>
<p>The young person may stand too close or too far away, may shy away from even slight physical contact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Associated with conditions such as Asperger Syndrome (AS) / Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach the young person about personal space (about the length of elbow to knuckles) and how getting closer than this is considered aggressive and too far outside is unfriendly • Explain how body postures are associated with emotions. How important it is to send the right signal so people will like you
<p>Often involved in arguments or is considered odd and avoided by their peers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not understand how hierarchies work, particularly informal ones amongst young people • The young person finds it difficult to work out how they should fit into a group. They may behave like the leader and try to direct others, or take no active part in a group due to uncertainty • The young person finds it difficult to pick up on what's fashionable (language, amount of body contact, interests etc) and is excluded from peers' company. <i>Associated with conditions such as Asperger Syndrome (AS) / Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following an argument, use cartoons with speech and thought bubbles to explain why it went wrong. • Consider using a 'buddy' system in which a peer / group of peers volunteers to keep an eye out for the young person • With parents' / young person's agreement the buddies could be briefed on why the young person has a difficulty • In formal group working situations, issue group-working role cards, so someone is appointed 'Coach' (with a simple description of what a coach should do / say), others are 'timekeeper', 'challenger', 'ideas person', 'spokesperson', 'leader' etc as appropriate • Provide simple visual reminders about aspects of interaction which are difficult, e.g. rules of conversation. These can be on a small card which the young person can refer to discreetly

Appendix 1: Narrative frameworks

Narrative frameworks are ways of giving structure to spoken and written narrative, (a description of an incident or story in chronological order with appropriate information to explain what happened). Formats can vary from a basic version with prompts about who, when, where and what happened, to something more complex (several episodes, high point, resolution, reactions). Young people with SLCN often ignore thoughts and feelings from their narrative, so thought bubbles can be included to prompt details about what they, or someone else thought at each stage

<p>The beginning. (Where did this happen? When did it happen? Who was there? Why were they there?) To begin with ...</p>	 <p>What I was thinking. I felt...</p>
<p>The event or problem. (What happened?) Then....</p>	 <p>Then I thought ..</p>
<p>(What happened next? How did the problem work out?) After that ...</p>	 <p>I was feeling</p>
<p>Conclusion. (how it finished) In the end</p>	 <p>When it finished I thought ...</p>

Appendix 2: Annoyed Scale

furious	8	School work gets ripped up
mad	7	Ankle kicked at football
angry	6	Computer switched off during a game
cross	5	Someone stares at you and calls you thick
annoyed	4	Pushed into girls
fed up	3	Horrible food for lunch
irritated	2	You can't find your magazine
bothered	1	It's raining on the way to youth club

Young people with SLCN often understand and experience emotions in simple, black / white extremes. To support this problem, develop emotional scales to build their understanding of a fuller, more appropriate range of triggers and relevant vocabulary.
Adult explaining to angry young person: "OK, so we are not doing your favourite activity during this session. That's a bit like having to eat something you didn't want at lunch. So you're not 'furious', just 'fed up'. How can you show that you're fed up?"

Appendix 2 (continued): Annoyed scales used in conflict resolution

	Tom		Jim		
furious	8			8	furious
mad	7	✕		7	mad
angry	6			6	angry
cross	5			5	cross
annoyed	4		✕	4	annoyed
fed up	3			3	fed up
irritated	2			2	irritated
bothered	1			1	bothered

Young people with SLCN often have a simple idea about what's fair: e.g. "He pushed me, so I kicked him, so that's fair"

Adult sorting out argument between Jim and Tom, talking to Jim: "Tom pushed you which is a number 4. That made you annoyed. But then you kicked him and hurt his leg, which is a 7. That made him really mad. Is that fair?"

Bibliography and recommended reading

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About Afasic

Afasic is the UK charity representing children and young people with speech, language and communication impairments, working for their inclusion in society and supporting their parents and carers.

Afasic was founded in 1968 as a parent-led organisation. Today Afasic is recognised as an authority in its field and works in partnership with other established and respected organisations.

Afasic provides children, young people, families and professionals with:

- Training and conferences
- Information sheets, newsletters and other publications
- Website information
- Support through local groups
- A telephone and email helpline service
- Expertise in developing good practice

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