

TALK TO ME!

UNDERSTANDING SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS



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Did you know more than half of all children and young people in care and youth justice systems are likely to have a speech, language or communication need? Unfortunately, most of these children usually **do not** receive a formal diagnosis, and the behaviours they instead use to communicate can be misunderstood. Understanding a child's communication needs is important to be able to put **meaning** behind their behaviour and to implement strategies **early** to address challenges and support their ongoing communication development.

Behavioural implications

Children with communication challenges often use behaviour to communicate their needs. Communication and learning go hand in hand, and when a child has communication difficulties their ability to learn is affected. Behavioural challenges are common when children are unable to engage in learning, especially where teaching is language based – did you know the need for language proficiency in a child's schooling significantly increases from Year 3?

Difficulty understanding language often contributes to presentations of **'defiance'** and can cause the child anxiety as they have **limited ability** to understand the words, sentences and stories used by those around them. Children often develop strategies that **mask** their speech, language and communication needs, such as relying on context, following what other people do, reading gestures and relying on their knowledge of familiar routines.

Impacts

Children who cannot communicate using language are particularly vulnerable, as they have limited ability to protest, to make their needs known or to communicate to others what they are experiencing. Children with communication difficulties can begin to feel **helpless** when they are consistently misunderstood by the people around them. They will often feel **ashamed** of their communication challenges and may not **disclose** them to their support networks.



Without intervention, speech, language and communication needs can have **significant** impacts on a child's future, with the primary impact often being disengagement from school and education. They also often affect the child's literacy, social engagement and inclusion, employment and mental health.

What to do

The best things to do to help a child you think may have communication difficulties is to **act early** and to **support their learning**. Here are some tips for both.

Support children to access intervention as early as possible:

- ✔ Book hearing and developmental assessments.
- ✔ Access speech pathology screenings.

Use strategies to support comprehension and learning:

- ✔ Use short sentences.
- ✔ Allow processing time between sentences (5-10 seconds).
- ✔ Use visuals to support verbal and written information.
- ✔ Explain complex words.
- ✔ Give permission for the child to tell you when they have not understood and check in with them to ensure they have understood.

Note: The terms 'child' and 'children' also refer to 'young person' and 'young people'.

Here to help! Come and talk to us if you'd like more practical ways you can be trauma informed.

Sources:

- > McCool and Stevens (2011). *Identifying speech, language and communication needs among children and young people in residential care*
- > Speech Pathology Australia (2019) *Speech Pathology in Justice Position Paper*
- > Source images: Freepik.com (Brgfx, Freepik)



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