

# I CAN Factsheet 6

## SUPPORT FOR PROFESSIONALS: Supporting Speech Language and Communication Needs in Residential Care Settings



Children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) may not be able to speak clearly, understand language, express ideas or interact with others. This can include difficulties with forming sounds and words, fluency, understanding what others say, producing sentences or using language socially.

This factsheet is designed for those working with children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in residential care settings and in foster care. It aims to provide simple and practical advice which supports the young person in their environment outside of school.

Some activities which are challenging to young people with SLCN, may have a particular impact within residential or foster care:

- coping with new routines and expectations
- following instructions given to a whole group
- giving explanations, e.g. if problems have arisen
- expressing feelings or worries
- interacting and making friends with other young people

Each individual with SLCN will have different needs, but here are some general ideas which may help them to understand and to contribute within their environment. It is important to remember that all young people will benefit from these strategies.

### 1. Understanding

Use simple and clear sentences when giving information or instructions. When in groups the young person may not be aware that an instruction addressed to 'everybody' is also intended for him. It is helpful to gain the young person's attention first by saying his name.

### 2. Time to Talk

Young people with SLCN often take longer to say what they want because:

- They may not understand
- They may need more time to think of their ideas
- They find it hard to put their idea into a good sentence and find the right words, especially for talking about feelings

When you ask a question or have a chat, give the young person extra time to think. Maintain eye contact with them, stay calm and don't feel tempted to keep guessing or prompting as this will only make it harder for them to think. If they are still struggling after several seconds have passed you can try one of the suggestions in the 'Finding words' section.

Try not to ask lots of 'open' questions where the young person will need to give a long answer. Balance this out with 'closed' questions, which need only a 'yes', 'no' or one word answer.

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### 3. Finding words

Many young people struggle to find the words they want to use. See if they can talk about the word and give key details as clues (such as what the item is used for or looks like) or say what sound it starts with. This will help to improve their vocabulary.

### 4. Speech

Some children have unclear speech, which makes it very difficult to have a conversation with them. They may be working with a speech and language therapist to improve this. If they have activities to practise, it will be really helpful if you could support this.

Don't pretend you have understood them if you haven't. Ask them to try and show you what they mean another way: this could be by getting them to write it down or draw a picture. Some children with SLCN need to use signing such as 'Makaton'

### 5. Eye contact

Young people focus better if they are looking at you when you are speaking as this may give them extra clues to help their understanding (such as facial expression). Before you speak to them, say their name and make sure you have their attention. This also shows the young person how to listen and interact well.

### 6. Visual support

Visual support is often beneficial, for example, using pictures, drawing, photos, gesture or signing to reinforce what is being said or to help young people explain how they feel. This helps them to understand and also helps them when they are trying to say something.

### 7. Routines and coping with change

We all have routines we need to follow and young people with SLCN can find routines reassuring. They often benefit from visual support with this, for example, it may help to use pictures to show the steps in a simple routine such as bedtime. This can also be helpful when preparing young people for changes to routine, such as going on a trip or moving to a new home.

### 8. Homework

Many young people with SLCN find homework difficult and may need extra help. Check that they understand the instructions they have been given, and help them to put their ideas into good sentences. With subjects such as maths it can help to check they can identify and understand the key words (such as add, subtract etc) and know what these mean. It is also useful to help them think about what steps they need to follow to complete the work, i.e, "First I need to....., then I need to....."

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### 9. Getting along

Young people with SLCN can have difficulties in making friends, they may not understand social rules or know what to say to get on with others. It may be helpful to model interactions, e.g. Let's ask X if you can play. You could say "Can I play too". You may need to support them in sorting out disagreements or misunderstandings.

### Useful contacts:

#### Afasic

2nd Floor  
50-52 Great Sutton Street  
London  
EC1V 0DJ  
Tel: 020 7490 9410  
[www.afasic.org.uk](http://www.afasic.org.uk)

#### National Children's Bureau 8 Wakley Street

8 Wakley Street  
London  
EC1V 7QE  
[www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk)

### I CAN:

I CAN is the children's communication charity. Communication is the essential 21st century life skill – the foundation on which children learn, achieve and make friends. I CAN works to develop speech, language and communication skills for all children. I CAN's particular focus is children who find communication hard.

I CAN works to ensure all people who have a responsibility to children, either directly or indirectly, from parents and teachers to policy makers, understand the importance of good communication skills.

### *Talking Point*

The first stop for information on children's communication. Visit [www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk) to access essential information on supporting children's speech, language and communication development.

Visit [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk) for further information on I CAN's work and to register for I CAN's monthly newsletter.

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