

# Speech, Language and Communication Needs

Exploring the relationship between SLCN and  
emotional well-being

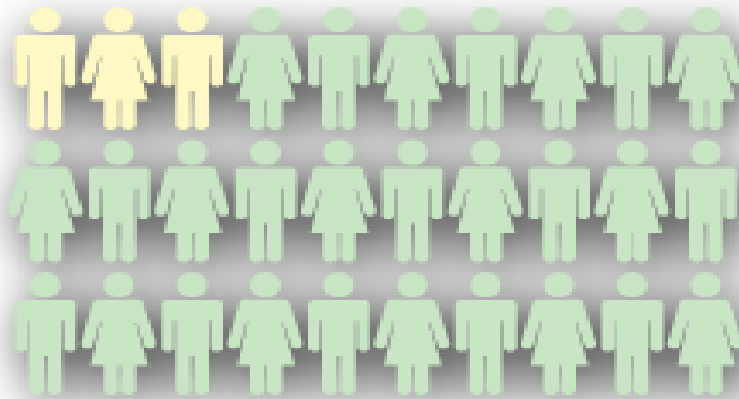
# Anxiety

# What is SLCN?

- \* **SLCN** is the umbrella term most commonly used to describe these difficulties. It stands for **Speech, Language and Communication Needs**.
- \* Children and Young People (CYP) with SLCN may have difficulty with **only one** speech, language or communication skill, **or with several**.
- \* They may have difficulties with listening and understanding or with talking or both. Each child also has a unique combination of strengths. This means that **every child with SLCN is different.** From: AFASIC

# The childhood disorder people have never heard of ...

## 1 million children and young people in the UK



7.6% **2 or 3** children in  
every classroom  
Up to 50% in poorer  
areas  
Under identified  
The most common SEND  
in Primary

### Ready for school ... good progress at school

# SLCN and Anxiety

- \* Anxiety disorders are among the most common psychiatric conditions that present during childhood
- \* They often co-occur with other diagnoses
- \* Individuals with developmental disabilities, such as language delay, are at increased risk, compared with typically developing children
- \* Children with ASD are at even greater risk for developing significant anxiety symptoms

# SLCN and Resilience

- \* In a recent Public Health England Report, good communication skills were identified as supporting resilience when it comes to mental health, with communication difficulties and poor social relationships identified as risk factors for mental ill health.

Public Health England (2016) *The mental health of children and young people in England*

# Typically developing language skills ...

- \* Speech, language and communication skills can act in a **preventative** capacity and are essential for developing and maintaining friendships, engaging in learning and supporting wellbeing.

# Hear their voices ...

‘It is hard sometimes with certain work you have got to do and you have problems with your speech so you understand what they mean but cannot make them understand what you mean so you can’t do the work and that is hard.’ **Jake, 17**

‘I find it hard when I am not sure what to do. It’s like when we’re going to play again and we’re not sure what to do. We say ‘Pass’.’ **Finn, 8**

‘I didn’t have a good experience with people, you know a lot of people who I thought of as friends turned their back on me, um and they *actually worry* me you know have I said something stupid, have I actually driven them away.’ **Josh, 13**

# What are the impacts of SLCN which can cause anxiety?

CYP's language difficulties can prevent meaningful communicative interaction

This can then limit social opportunities and therefore impact on the social behavioural development (Lindsay et al., 2007).

More recently, attention has turned to the speech and language abilities of children with behaviour disorders.



# What are the impacts of SLCN which can cause anxiety?

- \* Finding it difficult to talk and to understand what others say may chip away at a child's feelings of self-esteem, causing anxiety and leading to avoidance of social interactions and feelings of frustration and anger.
- \* Effective support needs to include:
  - (i) supporting confidence in social situations
  - (ii) supporting the ability to make and sustain social relationships.

# Why do communication skills matter?

- \* These skills have a profound impact on our lives, affecting our interactions, social and emotional development, mental health, behaviour, learning and attainment and later life opportunities for employment.
- \* Speech, language and communication skills are **central to so much of who we are**, what we do and the opportunities we have but when these vital skills do not develop as expected the **impact can be serious and long lasting.**

# Family

- \* The mental health of key adults in a child's life also has a part to play - post natal depression and poor parental mental health can contribute to a child's poor development
- \* There is evidence to show that the mother's capacity to provide a communicative environment and develop a secure attachment with her child is influenced by her mental well being.
- \* Supporting parents' mental health is therefore an important aspect of supporting a child's development and later opportunities in life.

# The facts

- \* For those children with SLCN, children with poor vocabulary at 5 are one and a half times more likely to have mental health problems at age 34 and
- \* Those with a history of SLCN are 2.7 times more likely to have a social phobia by age 19.

# By under-identifying SLCN ...

- \* We know that delayed language skills can lead to a range of difficulties such as anxiety, depression and behavioural problems.
- \* These have the potential to affect a child's overall functioning, educational attainment, lifelong development and opportunities.
- \* Yet – the most recent SEN data from the Department for Education indicates that only 2% of children are identified as having SLCN as their primary need.

# Risks ...

- \* The later children are identified as having SLCN, the harder it is for them to catch up. Children with unexplained language disorders have higher social, emotional and behavioural problems, with 88% failing to achieve early curriculum targets
- \* So, early language learning difficulties are linked to poor mental health, poor literacy skills and subsequent employment outcomes.
- \* A receptive language difficulty at five years is associated with a higher risk of mental health problems in adult life

# Risks ...with SLCN

- \* An increased risk of psychiatric disorders in adult life related to long term receptive developmental language disorders, e.g. theory of mind, verbal short-term memory and phonological processing difficulties, in association with significant difficulties in social adaptation
- \* More than 80% of unemployed young men display speech and language difficulties
- \* 45% of CYP people referred for mental health services have communication difficulties – three times more than

# What can we do?

- \* The December 2016 Public Health England report cited *Cognitive Behavioural Therapy* and early work focusing on problem solving as successful measures to support and alleviate a range of mental health conditions.
- \* These approaches rely heavily not only on **good communication skills**, but also in supporting the thinking, verbal reasoning and problem solving which is reliant on unimpaired speech, language and **communication skills**.



# Identify SLCN – and upskill the workforce

- \* For CYP with co-occurring mental health and communication difficulties, identification of their SLCN is vital
- \* Consideration is needed by the workforce to facilitate access to therapies, enabling **alternative** approaches, or to build appropriate communication skills in order to access the required support.