

## Identifying Speech, Language and Communication Needs

Speech, Language and Communication needs (SLCN) are often referred to as the '*hidden disability*.' This is because such difficulties are less apparent, more difficult to identify and have little provision for therapy input.

### Why are children with SLCN difficult to identify?

Children with SLCN look and act like other children, and many have intellectual strengths. However, children with SLCN become very skilled in hiding their impairments from others. Therefore, the longer it takes to identify them, the greater they become at hiding their problems.

These children are often labeled as;

- Slow learners
- The class clown
- An attention seeker
- A shy child
- Selective listeners
- Naughty
- A trouble maker
- Awkward
- Difficult

These are often misperceptions of children who have underlying and unidentified SLCN.

### SLCN - what does it look like?

These children are difficult to identify but our checklist should help you identify classic signs of SLCN.

Area of Need	Typical Signs
<p>Attention</p>	<p><i>“Miss. this is boring!”</i></p> <p>Children with attention and listening difficulties often struggle to focus on a task.</p> <p>They may often seem:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• easily distracted (by peers or noises in/outside the classroom)</li> <li>• fidgety</li> <li>• difficult (by refusing to do work because it is boring or <i>“too easy”</i>)</li> </ul> <p>They may try to distract others or find an alternative activity, which they find more motivating.</p> <p>They may be good at art and frequently ‘doodle’ on their page.</p> <p>They may be known as the class clown.</p>
<p>Hyperactivity</p>	<p><i>“Stay in your seat!”</i></p> <p>In addition to the signs above some children may appear much more hyperactive or impulsive.</p> <p>They may find it difficult to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sit for prolonged periods of time</li> <li>• Be organised and stay focused on the topic</li> <li>• Learn from their mistakes and will repeat mistakes</li> </ul> <p>They may seem to waste obvious talent in favour of being disruptive.</p>
<p>Hearing</p>	<p><i>“He has selective hearing.”</i></p> <p>Some children suffer from frequent ear infections or viral infections, which can impact their hearing. Other children might have unidentified hearing impairment.</p> <p>These children may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not always respond to their name</li> <li>• Rely on looking at others</li> <li>• Respond to shouting but not normal pitch</li> <li>• Stop listening because it takes a lot of energy to do so</li> <li>• Frequently say ‘what, ‘pardon,’ ‘eh?’</li> <li>• Not identify that their hearing has changed and therefore will not report it to parents/carers.</li> </ul>

Area of Need	Typical Signs
<p>Understanding Language</p>	<p><i>“Slow Learner” “Needy” “Confused” “Sensitive”</i></p> <p>Children who struggle to understand the language used around them may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have poor behaviour</li> <li>• Dominate a conversation</li> <li>• Respond with irrelevant information</li> <li>• Be frequently upset or withdrawn</li> <li>• Be very good at ‘covering up’ their limited understanding</li> <li>• Take longer to process language (information processing delay) - may seem ‘slower’ than other children</li> <li>• Prefer activities which do not rely on language e.g. tag or hide and seek</li> <li>• Misinterprets an instruction</li> <li>• Miss part of an instruction</li> <li>• Copy children around them - one step behind</li> <li>• Seem confused or may seem like they are 'day dreaming'</li> <li>• Pick up on non-verbal cues such as gestures, pointing</li> <li>• Rely heavily on context</li> </ul>
<p>Using Language</p>	<p>Children who have expressive language difficulties may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mix up words e.g. name a table as a chair</li> <li>• Mix up the structure of a sentence e.g. jumping boy instead of boy jumping</li> <li>• Miss out grammatical information such as ‘it, and, his.’</li> <li>• Overuse ‘fillers’ such as ‘thing, it, stuff.’</li> <li>• Avoid games which rely on talking to others</li> <li>• Avoid speaking in class</li> <li>• Misbehave when asked a question</li> <li>• Act immature for their age</li> <li>• Feel embarrassed</li> <li>• Feel frustrated or angry</li> <li>• Stop talking to others and become withdrawn</li> <li>• Have less sophisticated language than their peers</li> <li>• Struggle to find the words they want to use</li> </ul>

Area of Need	Typical Signs
<p>Pragmatics</p>	<p><i>“lonely” “awkward” “isolated” “bullied” “sensitive” “hurtful”</i></p> <p>Some children have difficulties with the social use of language, communicating with others and with interaction and play skills.</p> <p>These children may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find it difficult to start a conversation with someone</li> <li>• Say things which are inappropriate</li> <li>• Talk too much and give details which are not necessary</li> <li>• Provide too little information or respond with one word answers</li> <li>• Avoid eye contact</li> <li>• Struggle to understand facial expressions and tone of voice</li> <li>• May find non-literal phrases confusing (You better pull your socks up!)</li> <li>• Misunderstand sarcasm and become upset or agitated</li> <li>• Fidget and find it difficult to remain seated</li> <li>• Struggle to stay on topic and will ‘go off tangent’ and talk about their interests</li> <li>• Seem socially awkward</li> <li>• Find it difficult to meet friends or sustain relationships</li> <li>• Seem inconsiderate of others thoughts or feelings</li> <li>• Want to make friends but struggle to do so</li> <li>• Have no awareness of their difficulties</li> <li>• Become lonely, upset, withdrawn or isolated</li> <li>• Seek attention or misbehave</li> <li>• Struggle to wait their turn</li> <li>• Always want to be at the front of the line</li> </ul>