# Different types of speech, language & communication needs (SLCN)

The terminology used to describe SLCN can be very confusing. There are some frequently used words you may come across that are used to describe different types of speech, language and communication needs. Not everyone uses these words in the same way, but if you are confused you can ask the person talking to you to explain a bit more.

## Speech and language delay

The term **delay** is often used when a child has problems with speech or language, but skills are developing in the normal developmental sequence. This means that the pattern of development is as you would expect, but developing at a slower rate.

## Speech and language disorder

Children with a speech and language **disorder** learn to speak in a way that is different from the normal pattern or sequence of development; their speech and language development isn't what you would expect and they sound unusual, not just like a younger child.

## Specific language impairment (SLI)

SLI is a term that is used to describe particular difficulties with learning and using language. In SLI, these difficulties are not associated with factors such as general learning difficulties, or other conditions, such as cerebral palsy, hearing impairment or autistic spectrum disorders. The difficulties are only related to speech and language, hence the use of the term 'specific'. You can find out more about SLI from Afasic and I CAN.

# Comprehension (or receptive language) difficulty

Children may have difficulty **understanding** words, sentences or instructions. This may be particularly true when they have no other clues from gestures or what is going on around them or in unfamiliar situations with no other people around to copy. Delayed or disordered comprehension (a problem understanding words and sentences) is often hard for families to identify as children can be very good at using the clues around them, and this hides their difficulties.

# Expressive language difficulty

A child may have good understanding of words, but find it difficult to **use** language to express their own ideas, needs or feelings. They might be slow to build up the number and type of words they use. They may know certain words, but be unable to think of them when they're needed. They may have particular difficulty building up sentences and using correct grammar.

#### Speech difficulties

This is difficulty saying words clearly with the correct sounds. It may be due to a 'phonology' difficulty - i.e. the sound system is confused or an articulatory difficulty - difficulty physically saying the sounds. The child's speech may be difficult to understand even by familiar adults.

Phonology refers to the **speech sounds** used in a particular language. A child may struggle to learn to say all the sounds they need, and so their speech is difficult to understand.

#### • Social interaction difficulties (sometimes called pragmatic difficulties)

Some children find it hard to follow the **rules** of communication and interact socially with others. They struggle with things like turn-taking in conversations, eye contact, listening to others and changing the way they talk according to who they are talking to.

#### Stammering

Stammering is also sometimes called stuttering, dysfluency or non-fluency. The child may repeat words or parts of words, hesitate for long periods between words or totally get stuck on words. There is lots of information available on stammering available from the British Stammering Association.

#### Selective mutism

Some children are able to talk comfortably in some situations (usually with close family members at home) but are persistently silent in others (usually outside their homes and with less familiar people). This is often referred to as selective mutism which is linked to an anxiety around talking. Children may be able to join in activities that do not require speech, and some may be able to speak a little to their friends if they are not overheard. In other situations they can't talk at all. Details of SMIRA, an organisation that can help with understanding selective mutism can be found in the Useful Contacts and Organisations section.

#### Verbal dyspraxia

Verbal Dyspraxia is a condition where children have difficulty making and **co-ordinating** the precise movements their mouths need to make to produce clear speech. They find it hard to produce individual speech sounds and to put sounds together in the right order in words. As a result, their speech is often hard to understand even to family members. You can read lots more information on verbal dyspraxia on the Apraxia Kids website.