

# The Link

## SECONDARY

THE SPEECH & LANGUAGE MAGAZINE FOR SCHOOLS

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NEW LINK  
COMMUNITY

See pages 10-11

# CONNECT



ISSUE  
3  
2024

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NEW SLCN GLOSSARY REGULAR  
FEATURE  
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SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH  
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**W**elcome to issue 3 of **The Link Secondary**, your free speech and language magazine.

The public exams are finally over; hopefully affording you a moment or two to catch your breath and reflect on this past year. There's always lots to think about, especially when planning support for your students with SLCN for next year – we've got you covered in this edition!

A warm welcome to education journalist, author, and advisor **Matt Bromley**. Matt has written a two-part feature for The Link on unlocking the potential of all learners. In Part 1, Matt shares how, by adapting his teaching and providing the right support, he ensures that students with SLCN can access the same ambitious

curriculum and meet the same high expectations as their peers, thus supporting them to achieve their full potential (pages 4-5).

Next up is **Sara Alston**, SEND and safeguarding trainer and consultant, who tackles what can only be described as a 'tricky topic': that of 'Consent' and the language around it. Read her insightful and interesting article on pages 12-13.

See pages 16-17 for **The SLCN Glossary**, our NEW regular feature from our specialist speech and language therapy team. Each term, they aim to define different SLCN terminology and common SLCN diagnoses that you are likely to come across in the mainstream classroom – a great reference tool for all staff.

There's lots more in this issue to delve into, including support for

**SLCN learners using social media**, insights on **DLD and working memory** and a **tongue-in-cheek quiz for support staff**.

We're also celebrating the launch of our new membership area, **The Link Community**. Join to gain access to a wealth of speech and language resources and information to assist you in supporting your pupils with SLCN. Best of all it's completely FREE. Head to pages 16-17 to find out more and sign up!

I hope you have a good rest of this term. Look out for the next issue of **The Link** in October.



Editor, *The Link* magazine  
Speech & Language Link – award-winning assessments and support for SLCN.

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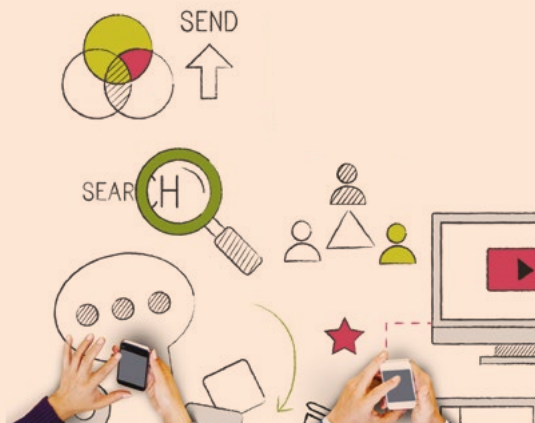
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# ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS

for secondary students with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)



By **Lorraine Petersen** OBE, educational consultant LPEC

Not only do children with SLCN struggle in the classroom but they also struggle in tests and exams.

**Access arrangements (AAs)** allow pupils with SEN, SLCN, disabilities or temporary injuries, to take part in assessments with adaptations to support their needs and fall into two categories:

- **Reasonable adjustments** are considered prior to the exam when a learner with SEN or disabilities is at a substantial disadvantage to others when taking an examination or assessment test.
- **Special considerations** are made post-exam if the learner was deemed to be temporarily affected by illness, injury or another indisposition and would therefore have been unable to complete an assessment to their 'normal' ability.

Some AAs are delegated to centres, others require prior JCQ (Joint Council for Qualifications) awarding body approval.

They must:

- Reflect the student's normal way of working (except in the case of temporary injury/impairment)
- Be considered on a subject-by-subject basis
- Not unfairly advantage or disadvantage the pupil
- Be agreed before the assessment and no later than the deadlines as set out by JCQ
- Late applications are allowed in the case of temporary injury/impairment or if a disability is diagnosed or a related impairment manifests after the deadline

**NOTE:** Schools should now be working towards examinations in summer 2025.

## The Role of the SENCo

The SENCo must lead on the AA process and work with teachers, support staff and exams officers to put approved AAs in place for internal school tests, mock exams and exams and to identify the most appropriate published format of modified papers.

The SENCo will also work with specialist advisory teachers, educational psychologists and medical professionals, where appropriate.

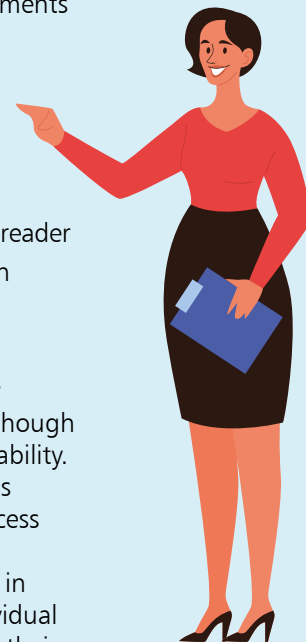
Teachers and senior leaders must support the SENCo in identifying, determining and implementing appropriate access arrangements and reasonable adjustments.

### \*AAs can include:

- Supervised rest breaks
- Extra time
- Use of a (human) reader or computer reader
- A (human) scribe or speech recognition technology
- Use of a computer/word processor

It is very important that we give every student an equality of opportunity even though they may have a learning difficulty or disability. This applies to not just in tests and exams but throughout their educational life. Access Arrangements are not just for GCSEs and A-Levels but should be applied every day in every classroom to ensure that each individual pupil can access their learning and reach their full potential.

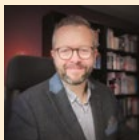
\*For the complete list of arrangements, please visit: [www.tinyurl.com/yc42uzrd](http://www.tinyurl.com/yc42uzrd) (these will be updated for 2024-2025).



LPEC specialises in the provision of training, advice and assistance to early years settings, teachers, schools and local authorities. Get in touch at: [www.lpec.org.uk](http://www.lpec.org.uk)

# IT'S NOT ABOUT ABILITY:

## How to ensure SLCN does not limit potential in the classroom



By **Matt Bromley**, education journalist, author and advisor

### Part 1 Differentiation versus adaptive teaching

**W**hen I talk to colleagues about supporting students with SLCN, I find myself repeating the mantra, "It's not about ability". Why? Because all too often, teachers and support staff assume that students with SLCN are less able than their peers without SLCN. But they are not. Students with SLCN may have additional needs which put them at a disadvantage in the mainstream classroom, whether in terms of understanding the curriculum or demonstrating their learning. However, these additional needs do not necessarily have to limit students' aptitude for success.

If we create truly inclusive classrooms, with a focus on equity not equality, then most students with SLCN will be able to access the same ambitious curriculum as their non-SLCN counterparts, and learn and progress, eventually attaining in line with their peers.

#### Some context:

According to Public Health England (2020)\*, around 1 in 10 children and young people are affected by long-

term and persistent speech, language, and communication needs. And yet, research suggests that as many as 40% of students with SLCN go unidentified (see Communication Trust, 2014).

The impact in the classroom is stark: just 20% of students with SLCN get a grade 4 or above in English and maths at GCSE (compared with 63.9% of all pupils).

One of the problems of identification in the secondary school setting is that language development is something generally associated with early years education. However, language and communication skills continue to develop throughout students' teenage years. Students continue learning new vocabulary and complex language structures to enhance their learning and interaction with others.

In my teaching, I've found that it is therefore important to encourage and extend this development. Furthermore, I've come to realise that my students need the ability to use language for negotiation, compromise, resolving conflict, developing relationships and for managing and regulating their emotions. My students need the skills required to be proficient communicators, for attainment, behaviour, emotional and social development and their readiness for the workplace.

\*<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-start-in-speech-language-and-communication>

## DIAGNOSIS IS KEY:

I've learnt that the first step to supporting students with SLCN is to correctly diagnose their needs...

Below are just some of the red flags that I have seen first-hand in my classroom that may indicate some difficulty with language and communication:

### A student may:

- Have a limited vocabulary knowledge compared with their peers
- Not volunteer answers in class or take part in discussions
- Repeat back what you've said but without understanding it
- Have difficulty following more complex sentences and instructions
- Look to their peers for clues to help them carry out an activity
- Use the wrong words for things or use a word that sounds similar
- Use very general words where a more specific word would be better
- Sound immature compared with their peers
- Seem to be struggling to express themselves, e.g., they may know a word but appear not be able to access it, resulting in lots of fillers or gesticulation
- They may find it difficult to follow social conventions and have difficulties initiating and maintaining conversations
- Find it difficult to understand non-literal language such as metaphors and sarcasm
- Avoid eye contact
- Show some disruptive or difficult behaviour due to difficulties understanding how to use language flexibly for a range of purpose
- Not use much expression in their face or tone of voice

**LOOK OUT FOR PART 2:**  
Mitigating the language demands of the classroom  
The Link Secondary  
issue 4  
October 2024

I teach students with SLCN the same ambitious, broad and balanced, planned and sequenced curriculum as all other students, and I have the same high expectations of them. I do not differentiate in the sense that I give students with SLCN different tasks to do and expect less of them. In fact, they all complete the same tasks and I assess them against the same criteria.

But, at the same time, I carefully consider the barriers that students with SLCN might face when accessing and understanding that curriculum, and when completing tasks. I then make effective use of adaptive teaching strategies, such as task scaffolding, to ensure they overcome those barriers.

Just **20%** of students with SLCN get a grade 4 or above in English and maths at GCSE.

Put simply, the difference is this: **differentiation** is about giving students different tasks to do and expecting less of some; **adaptive teaching** is about giving all students the same tasks but making adjustments to those tasks in order that all students can access them equitably.



# WORKING MEMORY AND LEARNING:

a guide to supporting secondary school students with developmental language disorder



By Yin Collighan, specialist speech and language therapist

I have to admit, my working memory is not great. I have hosted several dinner parties that resulted in my ravenous guests finally being served burnt, yet surprisingly cold, food at midnight, due to my struggles with calculating the correct timer settings, then eventually forgetting to set the timer at all. I love a good chat with my friends, but remembering what they are saying at the same time as working out what I want to say next can sometimes lead to rather disjointed conversations. My daily hunt for my keys (which I typically misplace whilst trying to find my phone) is a source of much amusement for my children: "Let's play mummy's favourite game: find her keys!".

My ability to work with information whilst keeping track of what I am doing has never been in tip top shape, but it has undoubtedly deteriorated with age. For students, a good working memory is advantageous for learning, socialising and organising oneself, relying on the ability to retain, process and manipulate information.

Students with developmental language disorder (DLD) have specific challenges with working memory (Archibald, 2018). They often demonstrate relative strengths with long-term memory; however their working memory is generally less robust. This particularly affects their ability to learn new words or comprehend complex sentences and can make complex cognitive tasks even more challenging.

But do all students with DLD have the same working memory challenges? No, they don't. It is posited that those individuals with low working memory capacity are likely to struggle with their verbal and non-verbal working

memory. Students with difficulties processing phonological (speech sound) information can have particular difficulties with their verbal working memory. Working memory is also influenced by language difficulties – verbal (or written, as language can impact literacy) explanations may be poorly understood and as such, harder to remember.

These activities are particularly tricky for students with DLD due to working memory difficulties:

- **Following multi-step instructions**
- **Note-taking:** the student may find it difficult to keep up, leading to incomplete or incorrect notes
- **Participating in discussions:** students might find it hard to remember what they wanted to say or build on others' points during class discussions
- **Working under exam conditions:** students may struggle to retrieve relevant information quickly or may forget it under the pressure of an exam setting
- **Understanding what they are reading:** students might find it difficult to remember content from previous paragraphs, which can hinder their ability to understand the flow of arguments or narratives in more complex reading materials
- **Problem Solving:** students may find it difficult to hold several pieces of information in mind while solving problems
- **Organising and Prioritising Work:** student may find planning and completing assignments in a logical sequence or managing their time efficiently difficult, leading to incomplete tasks or missing deadlines

## Strategies to support working memory in students with DLD

Whilst repeating sequences of numbers and letters were once a standard approach for memory training, recent insight suggests that we should move away from these approaches due to their limited effectiveness. Repeating sequences of numbers and letters improves performance in, well, repeating sequences of numbers and letters. Research shows that these traditional methods only have a narrow impact rather than strengthen working memory overall. Instead, the following strategies should be used:

- ✓ **Increase exposure:** provide multiple exposures to new information (up to 2-3 times more than for other students) to reinforce learning
- ✓ **Diversify learning experiences:** utilise varied methods like peer reviews, audio recordings, and vocabulary games to reinforce new concepts
- ✓ **Encourage rehearsal strategies:** encourage students to independently practice repetition of information to enhance retention
- ✓ **Space learning sessions:** distribute learning sessions over time to improve information retrieval and long-term memory integration
- ✓ **Manage cognitive load:** limit the amount of new information introduced at once and simplify the processing demands
- ✓ **Link to familiar concepts:** encourage assignments that connect new knowledge to familiar topics (e.g., sport), which can enhance relevance and retention
- ✓ **Use visual aids:** use graphic organisers and other visual tools to support understanding and memory
- ✓ **Work on language skills:** improved vocabulary and language comprehension can reduce cognitive load during learning tasks. Techniques like word maps can deepen understanding and retention of new vocabulary

These strategies have also proven useful in managing my own working memory challenges. I rely on alarms, lists and reminders to organise

tasks and remember important details and are key tools in my daily routine. Recently, I even invested in a key finder to mitigate my recurring struggles with misplaced keys, though ironically, it too was lost. This was an insightful (and expensive) lesson that highlighted how certain strategies are more appropriate for some people than others!

By implementing these strategies, educators can transform working memory challenges into opportunities for effective learning. These approaches not only aid in information retention but also foster a deeper engagement with the learning material, essential for students with DLD as they navigate the complexities of secondary education.



# stuttering selective mutism speech literacy ASD/ASC NEW REGULAR FEATURE SLCN glossary DLD COMMUNICATION expressive language




By **Sophie Mustoe Playfair**, highly specialist speech and language therapist and co-author of 'The Ultimate Guide to SLCN'

**S**upporting SEN in secondary schools is a demanding job and, by all accounts, the challenge is increasing. If you're reading this – you do a tough job and you should be proud of the work that you do.

While we hope that young people will arrive in secondary school having already benefited from early identification of their needs, early intervention and specialist support, and with clear steps forward and strategies in place to support educational journey, we have to admit that this is rarely the case. Staff in secondary schools (all staff!) need a greater awareness of the challenges faced by their students, so that they can be effective and feel confident in their roles.

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are one area that can sometimes be thought of as the domain of primary schools. However, SLCN should be on your radar as one of the most common types of SEN in secondary schools. It may have been identified and supported for years already, or it might have been missed, or misidentified, and only now being understood as a significant factor in a young person's education and wellbeing.



SLCN also underpins lots of other common problems for students, having a huge impact on academic and social outcomes for many young people. Upwards of 10% of all young people will face significant and lifelong SLCN, and many more may have milder needs which nonetheless can have lasting consequences if they are not addressed and met with appropriate support. But schools can do a huge amount to put in place effective support that will benefit students with SLCN and the whole school community.

In this multi-part series, we will introduce you to some of the key terminology related to SLCN, so that you can better recognise the signs and understand the impact on young people in the classroom.

## What is SLCN?

SLCN is an umbrella term which describes a huge range of needs which are related to any aspect of communication. Young people may be experiencing difficulties across one or



several communication skills, so on its own, this term doesn't generally give us enough information to know what a student might need in terms of support.

### Speech

By speech, we mean the sounds that we physically produce that communicate a message from our mouth to somebody else's ears. This is a motor process: coordinating the production of a string of sounds, which our listener can decode. At secondary school, the vast majority of students will have clear, intelligible speech that we can easily understand, although you may occasionally meet a pupil who has a persistent speech sound problem or a more significant speech disorder.

### Language

By language, we mean the words, sentences and grammar that are used to construct our messages. Note that language is not always transmitted by sounds! It's important to recognise that written language relies just as much on these same foundational language skills, so it's very common that children and young people with language difficulties will also experience problems with reading and writing. Literacy is another mechanism for language, not a completely separate skill. To understand 'language' better, we need to break it into two broad areas:

- **Receptive language:** this is our understanding of the message that someone else has given us. We need to understand the words used and the grammar of the sentence, alongside a range of extra components which we use to convey meaning, to be able to interpret the message.
- **Expressive language:** this is our ability to construct a message (putting together the right words, applying grammar, and more) to express our thoughts, wants and ideas to another person or group of people.

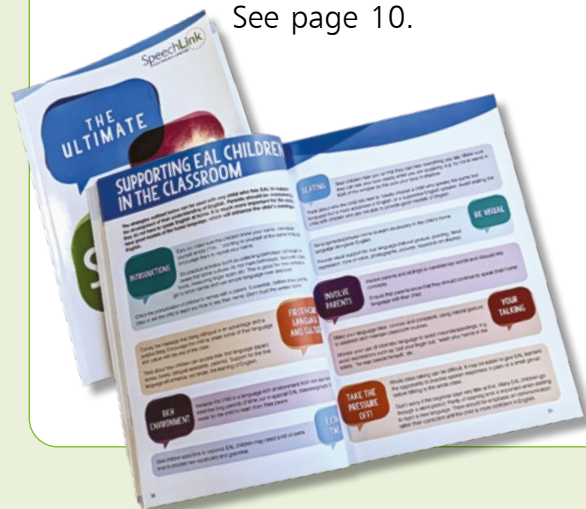
### Communication

Successful communication requires more than just the basic building blocks of speech and language. Communication refers to the whole process of successfully transmitting messages back and forth, and it's a hugely complicated task. We need to be able to sequence events, tell stories, monitor understanding, and seek or provide clarifications. We need to be able to adapt our language to build and maintain different types of relationships and use our skills flexibly and creatively so that we are successful in different scenarios. And when things go wrong, we need to be able to adapt, make repairs, and make sense of the fallout. We use more than just words to convey meaning.

Next time, we will explore some common diagnoses that you are likely to come across in a typical mainstream classroom.

## The Ultimate Guide to SLCN

This invaluable handbook provides detailed information on SLCN diagnoses. Get free access as a **Link Community member**. See page 10.



# Welcome to THE LINK COMMUNITY

We are inviting SENCOs, teachers, TAs/LSAs and HLTAs to join The Link Community, our new free online speech and language support area

We know that if you read The Link you are interested in supporting speech and language. So we set out to give you access to interesting articles and support resources all year round, in addition to your termly magazine.

## Introducing The Link Community

We have created this unique online support area with the aim to alleviate some of the challenges you face supporting pupils with SLCN. Your FREE membership provides access to resources and information to help you to work effectively with your pupils.

We understand how precious your time is and the struggle it can be to:



Locate suitable resources to support a student






Access accurate information about the different types of SLCN



Determine the most effective ways to deliver support












The Link Community can help you answer these challenges by:

-  Providing relevant resources – not just more generic worksheets
-  Enabling you to discover what the different types of SLCN are and what they mean in the classroom
-  Offering a free CPD event with access to The Link Live speech and language conference (tickets normally £80+VAT)

The new Link Community area contains a wealth of free information and specialist resources, carefully planned and created by the therapy team behind Speech & Language Link. Over 4000 schools use our Speech Link and Language Link packages and The Link Community members can be assured that the free resources have been created with the same level of depth and insight.

#### What's included?

-  The Ultimate Guide to SLCN
-  School speech and language audit tool
-  Access to The Link magazine library
-  Free ticket to The Link Live speech and language conference
-  SLCN support website for your parents & carers

-  The Speech and Language eNewsletter
-  Printable speech and language resources
-  Very special offers on Speech & Language Link services
-  Research opportunities for your school

#### Sign up today and:

- Be part of a unique community that recognises and understands the barriers you face when supporting SLCN, with a genuine focus on supporting you to overcome them
- Gain access to extensive materials and learning opportunities
- Increase your confidence in supporting SLCN to make a difference for the pupils you support

#### How much do I need to pay?

Membership is completely FREE.

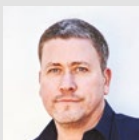
#### Where do I sign up?

[www.tinyurl.com/56ctv7xf](http://www.tinyurl.com/56ctv7xf)





# The Impact of **SOCIAL MEDIA** and online communities on SEND students' mental health



By **Paul Purseglove**, Founder of Sorted Mental Health:  
The Anxiety Support Community

**I**n recent years, the intersection of social media and mental health has become a focal point of concern and study, particularly for vulnerable users such as students with SEND. While these social media platforms offer valuable opportunities for connection and learning, they also pose significant potential risks. The nuanced dynamics of digital interaction can have profound effects on mental health.

## The double-edged sword of digital spaces

Research, such as that by the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) in the UK, suggests that about 90% of young people use social media. Their 'Status of Mind'\* report highlighted that social media use is linked with increased rates of anxiety, depression, and poor sleep among young people.

Notably, adolescents aged 12-17 are particularly susceptible, and while both genders are affected, girls often report higher levels of anxiety and depression linked to social media use.

Moreover, the relentless pace and often harsh nature of online interactions can overwhelm SEND students, who may face additional challenges in processing social cues and emotional responses. Cyberbullying is a significant risk, with the Anti-Bullying Alliance\*\* noting that children with disabilities are more likely to experience bullying online, which can lead to severe mental health issues.

However, the narrative is not all negative. Digital spaces also hold the potential for a positive impact, offering SEND students avenues to explore interests, express themselves, and connect with peers who share similar experiences. The key to unlocking these benefits lies in the structure and moderation of these spaces.

### Structured online communities: a safe haven

Enter the role of structured, positive online communities, tailored to provide support for individuals navigating mental health challenges or learning difficulties. Unlike the chaotic din of mainstream social media, these communities offer a moderated, supportive environment where SEND students can thrive.

In these carefully curated spaces, students are not defined by their disabilities but celebrated

for their unique perspectives. They can share experiences, challenges, and triumphs with peers who understand and empathise, often leading to profound personal growth and resilience. The ability to remain anonymous within some of these communities alleviates the stigma surrounding mental health, encouraging open and honest dialogue without fear of judgement.

### The importance of moderation and support

The difference between unmoderated social media platforms and structured communities lies in their approach to user interaction and content moderation. In structured communities, moderators play a crucial role in maintaining a safe environment, ensuring that discussions remain respectful and supportive. This level of oversight is crucial for preventing the spread of harmful content and protecting users from potential abuse.

Unmoderated forums often become breeding grounds for misinformation, cyberbullying, and predatory behaviour, as there is no active governance to curb these issues. Teachers should guide students towards platforms that demonstrate clear, enforced rules of engagement, transparency in their moderation practices, and mechanisms for users to report and block inappropriate content. Additionally, sites that provide resources for mental health support should have professionals overseeing content to ensure advice given is sound and beneficial.

### Beyond awareness: next steps

The digital age presents both significant challenges and opportunities for SEND students' mental health. Structured, positive online communities offer a critical counterbalance to the risks associated with social media. Let us commit to nurturing these inclusive spaces, both online and in our schools, to ensure that all students, regardless of their needs, have the support they need to thrive in an increasingly digital world.



Paul Purseglove is founder of **Sorted Mental Health**, which provides complete mental health solutions for schools, businesses and individuals.

**Sorted Mental Health**, in addition to its main community, provides distinct hubs, with each school maintaining its own hub, accessible only to authorised members. The hub administrators, usually school staff, are responsible for moderating discussions within their respective hubs, ensuring a safe and supportive environment. Beyond these individual hubs, the broader community benefits from AI monitoring of all shared content, enhancing safety and compliance. While users engage anonymously to protect their privacy, registration requires disclosure of real names and other details to maintain accountability.

Additionally, hub administrators have access to comprehensive reports and analytics, enabling them to track student engagement and progress, and log any conversations and interventions.

**Sorted** has developed a collection of classroom worksheets aimed at addressing the diverse facets of anxiety.

Alongside these, their free guide titled "*Anxiety at School: A Guide for Teachers*" provides detailed, practical strategies to support students experiencing heightened anxiety levels, whilst also addressing teacher self-care.



For more information, and to download a free worksheet, visit [www.sortedmh.uk/for-schools](http://www.sortedmh.uk/for-schools)

\*<https://tinyurl.com/23jj4bxe>

\*\*<https://rb.gy/osa2bs>

\*\*\*<https://teencentral.com/>

\*\*\*\*<https://www.childnet.com/>

# ASK A THERAPIST



By **Juliet Leonard**,  
specialist speech and language therapist

**Q** Given the constraints of space, time, and budget, how can we effectively support students with speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN)?

**A.** Juggling the needs of students with SEND amid the ever-present demands on resourcing and finances is a challenge which plagues most secondary schools.

Unfortunately, there's no magic solution; no guaranteed method of balancing the books while meeting the needs of students, but there are low-cost and sometimes no-cost ideas that we can all use to support students with SLCN, and here are a few...

## 1. Embrace the whole school approach

Fostering an environment where communication is supported and embraced is the key to sharing good practice and providing students with the right conditions for talking, listening, and learning to flourish. This can take many forms, but a few examples are:

- 👍 Schools which embrace a 'pens down talking time' (e.g., no pens day Wednesday)
- 👍 Schools who create opportunities for talking at less structured times of the day (break time, lunch time)
- 👍 Schools where everyone is on board with the communication vision – students, teachers, parents and carers, the office staff and the site team

## 2. Invest in your resource bank to save time later

There are many times, when working with a student, that I have thought "If only I had a resource for this". Creating and sourcing resources is a vital thread for supporting students with SLCN. Luckily, for our Secondary Language Link subscribers, alongside our fully resourced intervention groups, we have an immense bank of 'Classroom resources' which can be used throughout the school. A universal set of resources provides a clear message to all: we care about communication and we're all on board!

## 3. Build independence and double the result

'Onboarding' the wider school community already multiplies the impact of communication support in your school. As students move through Key Stage 3, they are constantly adding to their 'toolkit' of strategies and support. Whether this be a strategy to help them when they have not understood, a way of helping them remember important information, or a way to understand the command words in GCSE exams, this toolkit will aid them throughout their lives. **Secondary Language Link** subscribers have access to our 'Building Independence' resources, as well as the 'Communication Contract' (a unique document that the student builds, to share what they need, and what they can do) to optimise their communication skills in school.

## 4. Use what makes you unique

Town or country, large or small, your school and its community are unique. Perhaps you have fantastic outdoor space that can be enriched with communication strategies, or maybe you have access to amazing city buildings nearby. You may have a wide range of different languages spoken, or perhaps a larger number of students with SEND. However it is formed, your school community has the ingredients to be communication champions.

- 👍 Use the knowledge of children in a large, diverse school to learn vocabulary related to religion, culture, and diversity
- 👍 Large grounds lend themselves well to word walks, whilst smaller areas might have walls that can be used for words and ideas
- 👍 Smaller village schools often have great community links enabling communication out into the wider community

**FREE TRIAL**

To find out how Secondary Language Link can help you to develop the language skills of students in Key Stage 3, why not take an extended 4-week FREE trial at: [www.tinyurl.com/2fsajxyu](http://www.tinyurl.com/2fsajxyu)

# One TA to another

## Quiz time!



By **Claire Chambers**, editor – The Link magazine

Just for fun, take our quiz to find out what type of TA/LSA you are.

**Q1** You arrive at Year 8 Geography to find it in chaos: no teacher, Alfie B is writing obscenities on the board and Krystal is standing on a desk giving a pretty good rendition of Texas Hold 'Em – what do you do?

- A** Turn and run – back up needed!
- B** Start shouting and try and get control.
- C** Stand at the front of the class and give them 'the look' - peace is resumed!

**Q2** What's in your school bag?

- A** It's bit of a muddle really, but there's a pen in there somewhere.
- B** Sweets for bribing Alfie.
- C** The whole shebang – if it's been invented, you've got it!

**Q3** You're supporting a science lesson for the first time ever. You've never worked with this teacher before, and they seem to be completely ignoring you! Do you...

- A** Sit next to the student you are supporting and hope you'll get a grasp of what's going on.
- B** Bravely ask the teacher is there anything you should be doing. (You are promptly sent on a photocopying task!)
- C** You've already found out what the lesson will be about and have the confidence to support the students who need it!

**Q4** You have been assigned to support a particular student in her lessons, but she is very hostile towards you – what do you do?

- A** Try and find some common ground, letting her initiate conversation without pressurising her.
- B** Ask your SENCo if you can support a different student.
- C** It doesn't matter if you don't get on – getting the work done is the most important thing!

**Q5** You are going to be observed by your SENCo and you really want to impress – what do you do?

- A** Be as natural as possible – do what you normally do, but at your best!
- B** Overthink the task and find yourself losing the aim of the activity.
- C** Produce an all singing, all dancing activity with a plethora of laminated resources.

### SO HOW DID YOU SCORE?

**Mostly A The Care Giver.** Great at building relationships with students, but you could be a bit more organised.

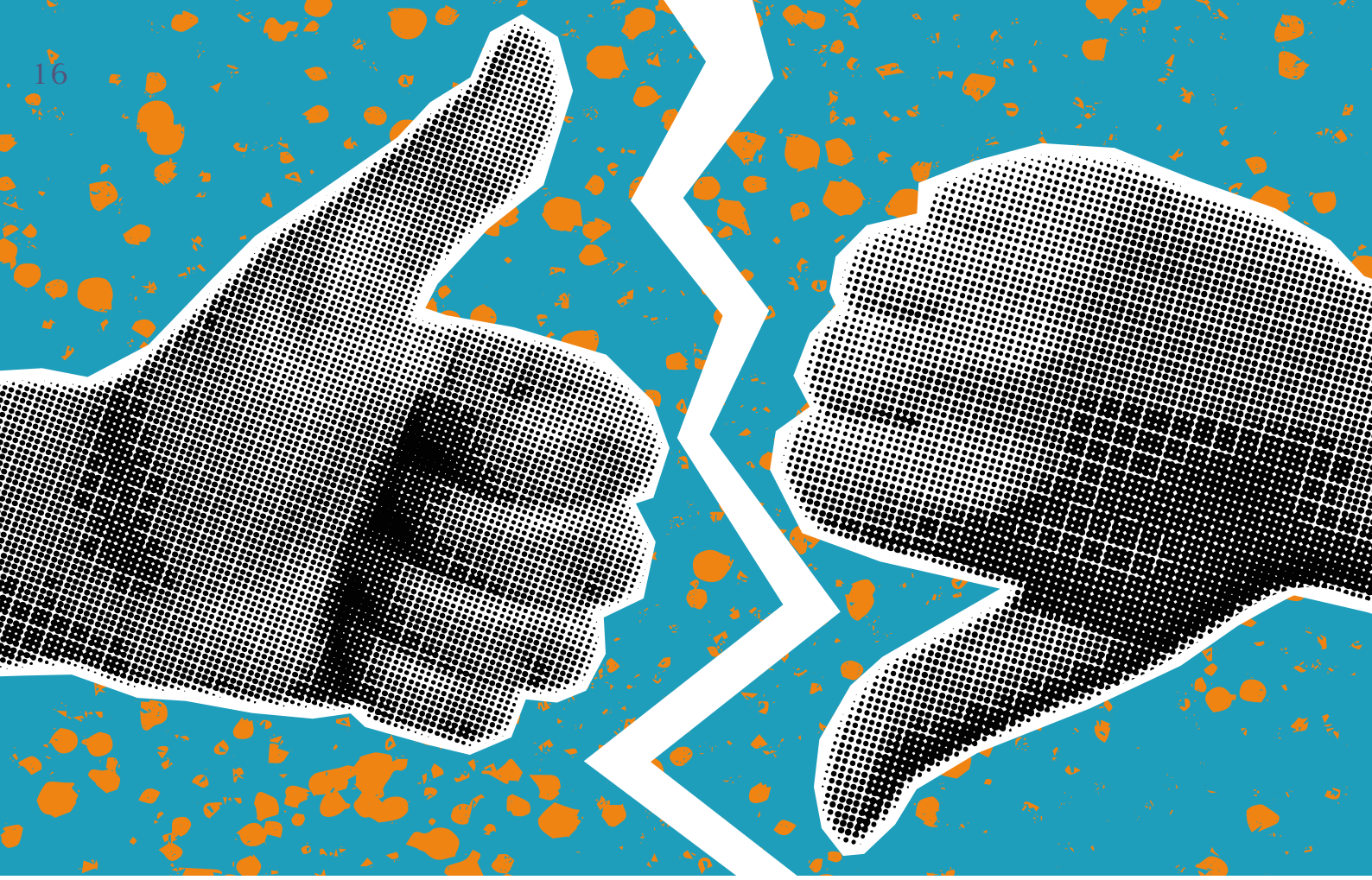
**Mostly B The Worrier.** You want to be liked AND do your job well. Why not talk to your SENCo about how they can help you build your confidence.

**Mostly C The Guru.** You're the one that the other support staff turn to – you're unfazed by most situations as you have seen it all before. Just remember that the student is different (even if the situation is the same) and creating a relationship with them will go a long way to getting the best from them.

I have been A, B and C in every single one of these scenarios (especially B in my early days) and I guess many of you have been too.

**However you scored – just remember how brilliant you are!**





# The language around teaching **CONSENT**



By **Sara Alston**, SEND and safeguarding trainer and consultant,  
SEA Inclusion & Safeguarding

**T**eaching about consent is always difficult and complex, but even more so for children who struggle with social communication and language skills. Understanding consent requires a complex and nuanced understanding of verbal and nonverbal language, but often is reduced to “remember to ask” and “you can say no”. This simplification obscures that consent is a two-way interaction. Consent

involves not only asking, but listening and understanding the other person’s response, often in the heat of the moment. It is about being able to formulate and express a clear, unambiguous, usually verbal, response. Successful communication about consent requires the use of effective expressive and receptive language, often while under the influence of heightened emotional and physical feelings.



For children with communication and interaction difficulties (COIN), teaching of consent needs to start early and be repeated through their educational and non-educational life to embed the messages, give opportunities to practice the language and enable them to apply the learning in a range of settings. This will start with questions like "Can I play with this?" and "Will you play with me?". The idea of asking, listening and responding as part of interactions and relationships is the basis of consent.

It needs to be remembered that this should apply to interactions with adults as well, so that we work with parents to avoid interactions like "Give Grandma a kiss!" and instead use "Would you like to give Grandma a kiss?" or "Ask Grandma, if she would like a kiss?" The option to say "no" should be there for both parties in these interactions.

But we cannot assume that because a child has got and can use this language in social interactions, they can relate or apply it to romantic or sexual relationships. The teaching of the vocabulary is key. Not only the scientific names of body parts and processes, but the non-scientific names and that there can be more than one name for a single body part. For many children with COIN needs, the idea of the multiple names for genitalia and sexual acts is very confusing.

To cover our embarrassment and in a bid to make it simpler for the majority, we often fall back on euphemisms and analogies when we are teaching about consent and relationships. The best-known example is the 'tea analogy'\*. This is helpful for many people. But for others this adds confusion rather than elucidation as they struggle to link the information, generalise learning from one context to another or understand the social conventions in either context.

The use of euphemistic and informal language can cause confusion and reduce the ability of those with communication and interaction needs to discuss sexual and romantic relationships effectively. A question like 'How far did you go?' is more likely to elicit a response about a car journey than sexual activity. This is another area that needs explicit explanation and teaching.



For many with social communication difficulties, the issue of understanding consent is complicated by their insecure understanding of fact and fiction and if not enabled to discuss sexual relationships in a realistic manner, their understanding can become based on computer games or romantic novels and films which do not depict consensual relationships, the requesting or giving of consent. These images need to be countered head on to prepare children for the realities of relationships and consent.

For students, particularly those with SEND, to develop an effective understanding of consent we need to ensure that they attend and access the relevant lessons. Too often pupils with SEND miss PHSE lessons to attend intervention groups. Further, the lessons need to be fitted to their individual needs with explicit teaching of language, clear explanations and social stories relating to specific contexts. These need repeating as the students mature and their needs and understanding change.

Keeping Children Safe in Education (2023)\*\* is clear that '*communication barriers and difficulties in managing or reporting these challenges*' increase the vulnerability of pupils with SEND for safeguarding risks both on and offline. Failure to provide these children with the language they need to discuss consent increases these challenges. As does an infantilisation of children with SEND leading to an assumption that they won't need this language as they will not have sexual feelings. This both ignores the reality of their lives and increases their greater vulnerability as possible victims of abuse.

Sara Alston is a practicing SENCO and an independent SEND and Safeguarding Consultant and Trainer with over 35 years teaching experience.

She is the co-author of **The Inclusive Classroom: A New Approach to Differentiation** (Bloomsbury, 2021). Her latest book, **Working Effectively with Your TA**, was published in February 2023.

Bloomsbury publishers are offering **25% discount** on both books with discount code ALSTON25 at: [Bloomsbury.com](https://www.bloomsbury.com) (offer valid until June 30th 2024).



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welcome to

# The Link

## CALLING TEACHERS AND SUPPORT STAFF

Please take part in a short survey to help us find out the level of training teaching staff receive on SEN/SLCN, particularly language disorders.



Look out for the results in the autumn edition of The Link in an article to promote 'DLD Awareness Day' – 18th October. All entrants have the chance of winning a Speech & Language Link travel mug AND a copy of 'The Ultimate Guide to SLCN'.

Closing date: 31st July 2024.

Good luck!



## Dates for your diary

Our events team are looking forward to the following conference and exhibitions:

JULY 5<sup>TH</sup>

nasen LIVE 2024, NEC, Birmingham (stand 15)

OCTOBER 11<sup>TH</sup>-12<sup>TH</sup>

Tes SEND Show London

Come and hear Kate Freeman speak on 'Reaching missing pupils with SLCN' and visit us on stand 165

OCTOBER 22<sup>ND</sup>

SEND Network, Norwich

NOVEMBER 13<sup>TH</sup>

Education People Show, Kent (stand 403)

NOVEMBER 21<sup>ST</sup>

The Link Live Speech & Language Conference



## OUR FACEBOOK GROUP SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

Join the conversation with over 3000 members and receive weekly videos and posts from our speech and language team, take part in fun, short polls and surveys and share good practice.



# Community news

TICKETS  
ARE LIVE

## The Link Live

speech & language conference is back for 2024

LinkLive  
EVENTS

**Date:** 21st November

**Time:** 9am – 5pm

**Venue:** Online

**Tickets:** Free for  
**Link Community**  
members\*  
(previously £80+VAT)

(\*see pages 10-11 for more details)

### The Link Live speech and language conference

Bringing speech and language therapists and specialist SEND speakers together to present on a range of topics aimed at helping you support SLCN in early years, primary and secondary settings.

- 👍 8 presentations
- 👍 Delegate chat throughout the day
- 👍 Live Q&A with speakers
- 👍 Special conference prize draw

### Who should attend?

SENcos, teachers, ECTs and TAs and all educators supporting SLCN in schools. The Link Live aims to offer insight, ideas, and practical takeaways for everyone.



The Speech & Language Link  
whole school approach



More info: <https://tinyurl.com/m3mry92k>

teach  
SECONDARY  
AWARDS 2023  
FINALIST

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- 👍 **Offering in-package training** with The SLCN Toolkit teacher training resource.
- 👍 **Giving support** through our Help Desk and speech and language therapy team

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