

Lancashire Language Leads Newsletter

Summer 2023



At a glance



- Foreword by the EYSLCN Team
- Focus on practice – Reluctant Talkers
- Spotlight on English as an Additional Language
- Supporting transitions for children with SLCN
- Walk and Talk Cards
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Hello everyone and welcome to the Summer term 2023 and our EYs SLCN Summer newsletter.

In March of this year, The Princess of Wales held the first meeting of her Business Taskforce for Early Childhood.

The aim of this taskforce is to help her change the way society views and prioritizes young children and their environments.

In a speech delivered during the meeting, The Princess of Wales explained that her mission “is about looking at childhood holistically. Looking upstream in a preventative manner to promote healthy life outcomes for us all. From pregnancy to age five, our brains develop at an amazing rate, faster than any other age. During this time, we lay the foundations and building blocks for life. It is when we learn to understand ourselves, understand others and learn about the world in which we live.” She added that those experiences “lay the scaffolding for our abilities and capabilities as we grow...This time really is a golden opportunity to transform our future life outcomes.”

As early years practitioners, this is a philosophy to which we all subscribe and work tirelessly towards daily in our practice.

We are all very aware of the challenges we face in early years education whatever our role, however we should continue to be proud of the work we do and the role we play in building a supportive and nurturing world around children and families and within the wider community. Not only that, "the societal impact we could have, if we work together on this, could transform lives for generations to come. As the saying goes, it really does take a village."

We do hope you enjoy this edition of our newsletter and find the articles interesting and informative – as always, we welcome your feedback, thoughts and comments and ideas for future editions and for our cluster meetings.

We hope you all have a great Summer term.

Best wishes from the Early Years SLCN Team



Next Cluster Meeting

Wednesday 24th May at 13.30-15.00

LINK at the end of the newsletter

Early years staff members have seen an increase in the number of children who talk happily and noisily to close family but say much less outside the home. It is important that children need to be eased into new settings gently, so that initial reluctance to speak does not become an intense fear of speaking (selective mutism).

How do you spot the difference between 'quiet' children vs. selectively mute?

The actual diagnosis of selective mutism is usually given by a speech and language therapist or a Clinical Psychologist. However, it is important to not delay support for a diagnosis.

Things to look out for in the reluctant/quiet child:

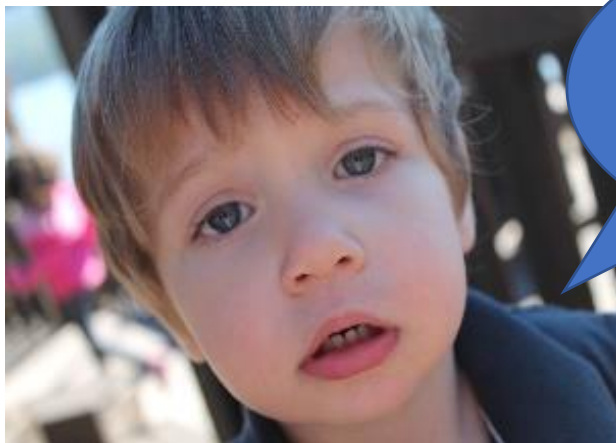
The quiet child may be reluctant to speak but they do not have a fear of the physical act of talking. They may be generally be unsure of themselves, not interested in the topic or concerned about the consequences of talking e.g., making a mistake. With gentle support most reluctant speakers including shy children and those with SLCN will be talking within a few weeks. BUT if pressurised to talk too early there is a risk, they will associate talking with feeling distressed and uncomfortable.

Therefore, if in doubt, treat any quiet, anxious or reluctant young child like a child who has selective mutism.

Things to look out for in selective mutism:

- These children are NOT unhappy, and they are not necessarily shy, quiet or introvert, often they are quite the opposite when feeling relaxed

- They are NOT rude, purposefully ignoring you or trying to get attention
- Their behaviour is NOT due to wilfulness, stubbornness or manipulation
- Look out for children who are stiff and frozen in their facial expression or body movements. This is usually caused by extreme anxiety. Focus on physical activity, laughter and general noise making to help them relax.
- Do NOT take this personally – their fear is like any other phobia and the children would love to be able to talk to you



“Please take the pressure off and be my friend”

TOP TIPS - *For supporting both reluctant talkers and a child with selective mutism within an early years setting*

- Concentrate on having **fun** by following the child’s lead and joining in their play – **remove ALL pressure on the child to speak**. Help children settle without pressure to talk.
- **Enable the child to join in and interact in any way they choose**. Adapt activities so the child can be with a small group of friends and so no verbal response is needed e.g., they can use pointing, nodding, choosing a picture, talking through a friend or in unison. Make *talking a pleasant experience*.

- Use **comments and statements** rather than direct questions e.g., *hmm. I wonder where this piece goes, or it's cold in here, isn't it, this is good, I suspect you've got one, haven't you.* These kinds of rhetorical questions do not expect a response.
- Do not look at the child while you wait for a response (this will help reduce feelings of pressure)
- **Do not react or praise them for talking.** Later on, comment on how well they did without mentioning the speaking e.g., 'you know all your numbers, well done', 'thank you for being such a kind friend'



"I'm scared that you want to talk to me"

- Give the child responsibilities and describe and praise the things they do well.
- **Reassure** the child that talking will get easier and they don't have to talk straightaway e.g., its ok to take your time and talk when you're ready'
- Make sure no adult applies pressure to talk using bribery, persuasion, or negative comments. Never force children to say 'hello', 'please', 'thank you' as social conventions are often extremely difficult for anxious children.

- **Include** plenty of activities which involve children moving, singing or talking in unison.
- Encourage people that the child talks freely to, to visit the setting to help the child feel relaxed. Parents could also ask children from nursery or school to play at home.
- Check their Speech, Language and Communication skills are age appropriate e.g., by speaking to parents or referring to telephone drop in line to discuss further.
- More information can be found on www.smira.org.uk



By expecting *less* while supporting *more*, children are allowed to succeed and develop the confidence to take small steps forward.

References: Maggie Johnson handout on helping young children to speak at school

[Information for Professionals - SMIRA \(selectivemutism.org.uk\)](http://selectivemutism.org.uk)

**Frances Benson,
Speech and Language Therapist,
Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.**

Children who are bilingual (i.e., who are able to understand and/or use two or more languages) may benefit from extra support around their communication needs.

However, it is important to remember that being bilingual is an advantage and does not cause or contribute to difficulties with speech, language or communication.

Just because a child is learning English as an additional language, it doesn't automatically follow that they will need support from a Speech and Language Therapist. Children who are still learning English may show differences in their abilities between their home language and English, but this can be because they are still in the process of learning their new language, rather than due to specific language difficulties.

A Speech and Language Therapist would only need to be involved if it is found that they have specific difficulties with their speech and language skills in both their home language as well as English, as this suggests a more general difficulty with language, rather than just that they are learning a **new** language.



General Strategies to support children who are learning English as an Additional Language

There are lots of general strategies which can also be helpful to use with children who are learning English as an additional language, to support their understanding and use of language. For example:

1. Make sure you have children's attention before talking to them. Limiting background noise or other distractions can make it easier for them to focus their attention on what you are saying.
2. Use short, simple language to help children tune into the words you are saying.
3. Give children plenty of time to listen to and take in verbal information, as well as to communicate their ideas to you.
4. Encourage any means children use to communicate with you, e.g., pointing or using other gestures, even if they don't have the words yet.
5. Use visual supports to back up spoken information, e.g., pictures, photos, objects.
6. Model words and short sentences for children to hear. Don't put pressure on children to copy you back- it's enough for them to hear models of the language we want them to use.
7. Use plenty of praise and positive reinforcement to build confidence.
8. It is important for the child to continue to develop their skills in their home language as well. As part of this, we should make sure we show that we value all aspects of the child's home culture.

Advice for Bilingual Families

- Developing their home language will help your child to learn English as well.
- It is ok for children to speak in their home language when they are at school.
- It is ok for children to mix English and their home language in one sentence.
- Adults at home should speak the language in which they are most proficient and confident in order to provide good language models.
- Children learning an additional language commonly go through a silent period where they might say nothing at all in the new environment. This is a natural process.
- There is no evidence to suggest that bilingualism causes speech and language difficulties.

If you are concerned about a child's language development, contact your local speech and language therapy department.

[Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service:: Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust \(lscft.nhs.uk\)](https://www.lscft.nhs.uk)

[Children's Speech and Language Therapy | Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust \(bfwh.nhs.uk\)](https://www.bfwh.nhs.uk)

**Jodi Roberts,
Speech and Language Therapist,
Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust.**

Starting school can often be a stressful time for all children and their parents and carers but when a child has difficulty understanding their environment or expressing their emotions a greater level of planning is required.

Transitions need to be managed carefully and sensitively, in particular to ensure the social and emotional wellbeing of the child in your care. Changes to the environment and key caregivers need to be carefully planned and carried out in a sensitive way. There is a range of advice, materials and resources to support this.

It is also important to consider and involve parents and carers in the process so that they are reassured and able to contribute to an effective transition.

The most successful transitions combine a mix of formal information sharing procedures with additional activities and strategies tailored to the needs of each child and the settings involved; whether handing over from a separate nursery to a Reception class or changing age groups within a school early years unit.

Local Offer

Firstly, transitions should already be referenced in your setting SEND Policy and Local Offer. For example, it could include arrangements for the transition of a child from one setting to another, and procedures where a child attends more than one setting. You need to say how you pass on information when a child with SEN leaves for another setting or school, and how you discuss common approaches to meeting a child's needs.

There is also guidance in the *STS Early Years Toolkit: Senco Handbook* including, on page 33, eight practical pointers for an effective transition.

Planning ahead

The SENCO, along with key staff, can plan and prepare for transition once the receiving school place has been confirmed in the spring term. Moving into summer term more practical procedures can begin.

Part of this process would involve a Transition / TAF meeting to discuss successful strategies, progress and adjustments required. Specialist teachers can provide guidance on this, including sample agendas and a checklist of actions for good practice before, during and after the meeting.

Individual targeted learning plans, assessments and observations and speech therapy episode plans will be shared. Key staff, with parents or carers, can also complete a Transition Portrait for the child. This is a more informal but brief record of routines, strategies, expectations and responses from arrival to pick up, that will give a day-to-day picture of the child in class.

Additional strategies

It can be useful for children with SEND to have additional opportunities to visit school and attend more induction sessions. Sometimes have one or two visits at the end of the day when it is quieter and less distracting or arrange a virtual tour using a video or slideshow presentation.

Children with communication difficulties will benefit from additional visual resources such as photo books of key staff and areas of learning, social stories of the journey to school, routines on arrival and communal areas like the hall and playground.

Refer to the STS leaflet *Supporting Transition to Primary School for Young Children with SEND* for more guidance.

Making adjustments

After the transition meeting, Reception teachers and key support staff may need to prepare extra resources in preparation for a successful school start. Depending on the communication needs of the child these may include:

- A staff meeting to refresh a practical Total Communication approach,
- A handy set of traffic lights for each adult,
- A box of objects of reference for common routines, areas of learning and activities,
- A set of visual cues in the form of symbols or pictures,
- Specific tasks and activities recommended by the Specialist Teacher, Educational Psychologist or Speech Therapist,
- Resources suitable for an earlier level of development that are not usually stored or available in the Reception class,
- A list of words, phrases, and prompts agreed by all staff with parents and carers so that children hear the same consistent language.

Often, setting up a continuous whole class approach of augmented communication systems can benefit a larger cohort of children while providing effective inclusion for those individuals who require greater support.



Useful links

[Early years SEND toolkit - Lancashire County Council](#)

[Getting ready to start school - Lancashire County Council](#)

[School readiness and supporting pre-school children for the transition to school - Lancashire County Council](#)

The Graduated Approach

Practical pointers for effective transition

A flexible settling-in process.
Consider time, length and frequency of visits.

Ensure that the allocated key worker liaises closely with parents and is available during visits.

Setting to visit child at home prior to the start date (wherever possible).

Provide information about the new setting e.g. picture/photo booklet for the child to share at home.

Ensure that the setting has all of the information about a child prior to the start date (with parental consent).

Allocate time for key workers to share relevant information, including when transitioning between rooms within the setting.

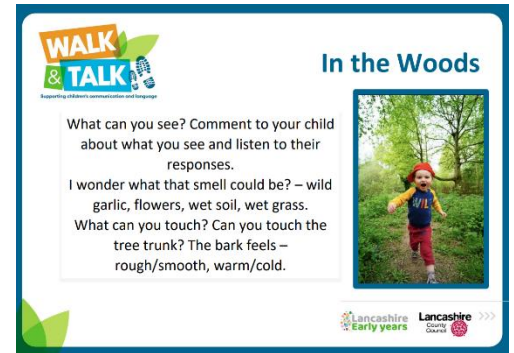
Setting has accurate systems for summative assessments and this is shared with new setting.

In the summer term before school, introduce activities to prepare for school such as dressing up, stories.

**David Adshead,
Early Years Specialist Teacher,
Specialist Teaching Service, Inclusion Service**

Walk and Talk Cards

The Walk and Talk cards pack consists of fourteen colourful A5 cards. They are prompts to give out or use with parents or staff when out on a walk. They will enable less confident staff and parents to use these to find key areas or items on their walk and talk about with their children.



The cards are designed to support discussion and help you to initiate and build conversation with young children. They can also be used on parents' boards and your display boards. You can also purchase a set of 14 bingo cards which are a pictorial version of the prompt cards.

The cards cover prompts for:

- At the bus stop
- At the castle
- At the library
- At the park
- At the shops
- At the train station
- By the canal
- By the river
- In the garden or backyard
- In the woods
- On the beach
- On the street
- Outside my house
- On the way to...

The cards are available to purchase in English, Gujarati, Urdu, Ukrainian, Polish, Bengali and Punjabi. You can also purchase a set of 14 bingo cards which are a pictorial version of the prompt cards.

Cost:

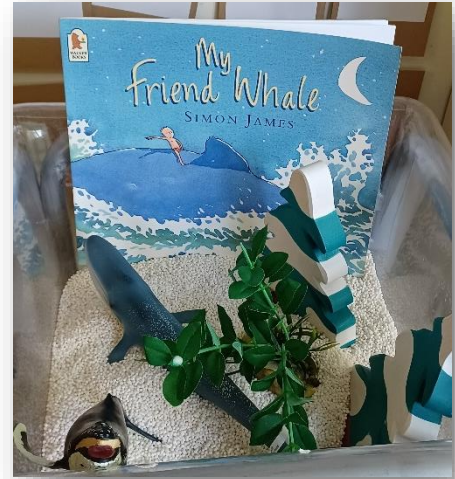
- full set of all six languages plus a set of bingo cards: £28
- any individual language packs: £4 each
- set of bingo cards: £4

You can order online [HERE](#)

How can I use books to help develop my child's language?

There are lots of ways that books can be used to develop children's talking and understanding as well as developing speech sounds. Try some of the following strategies:

- Use 'fun' words like 'wheeee' and 'boom' to help bring the story to life. Make animal noises like 'baa' and 'moo'.
- Use props or real objects to accompany a story to make the pictures more real to the child
- Sometimes it's ok to sit back and watch how your child reacts to a book. Which bit interests them? Are they trying to say some words?
- Don't rush reading; sometimes children may want to spend time talking or looking at one particular page
- Try missing out the end of a sentence and pausing when the sentence is familiar and/or repetitive e.g., that's not my...(lion) or 'just like...(daddy). Your child may then take the opportunity to fill in the word.
- Try to avoid too many testing questions such as 'what's that', 'where's the dog' and so on. These can be useful sometimes, but children benefit more from hearing you say the words and using strategies like pausing to see if they copy e.g. I can see a dog; you can see a (pause)...



From: Using Books to Develop Language

[using-books-to-develop-language.pdf](https://www.speechandlanguage.org.uk/using-books-to-develop-language.pdf) ([speechandlanguage.org.uk](https://www.speechandlanguage.org.uk))

Useful Websites

Darcie's story – a video about Developmental Language Disorder
[Darcie's story - a video about DLD. #2in30 - YouTube](#)



High quality interactions in the Early Years- The ShREC approach
[High quality interactions in the Early Years - The ShREC approach - YouTube](#)



Speech, Language and Communication Needs Resources
[Speech, Language and Communication Needs Resources \(councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk\)](#)

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[Click here to join the meeting](#)