TOP TIPS FOR SUPPORTING SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS

This document was created by the DSPL Outreach Team in collaboration with the SLCN Working Group

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Introduction

At DSPL9, we believe that Speech, Language and Communication (SLCN) are fundamental for student's learning and development. During these unprecedented times we anticipate that there will be a significant increase in students with SLCN returning to our schools. Possible factors for this increase may be:

- Home environment
- Lack of social communication opportunities
- Trauma
- Increased use of electronic devices.
- The reduction in involvement from The Speech and Language Therapy Service for many students

We predict that the increase in the number of students displaying SLCN, will result in school's seeking the involvements of the Speech and Language Therapy Service; however, it is anticipated that now schools are fully open this service will be unable to provide their usual package of care for some time. If we think back pre COVID-19 there were already significant delays in students being seen by a Speech and Language Therapist, and the current crisis is only going to make this delay greater. Consequently, it is imperative that we as educational professionals are able to provide the best possible support for our students with speech, language and communication needs. This includes increasing our knowledge about SLCN, understanding how difficulties may present and most importantly how we can support these students in school.

The 'Top Tip for supporting students with SLCN' document was created by the Speech, Language and Communication Outreach Team based at Central Primary School (Watford). This aim of this document is to provide educational professionals with information, strategies and resources to support students with SLCN in their return to school. Although the content is aimed at supporting students with SLCN many of the strategies will also support other students with their speech, language and communication skills.

What is SLCN?

Some children and young people find it difficult to listen, understand and communicate with others and may need support to develop the surprising number of skills involved. SLCN is the umbrella term most commonly used to describe these difficulties. It stands for Speech, Language and Communication Needs. Students with SLCN may have difficulty with only one speech, language or communication skill, or with several. Students may have difficulties with listening and understanding or with talking or both. Each student also has a unique combination of strengths. This means that every student with SLCN is different. (Afasic,2020).

<u>Four key terms of SLCN</u>

Receptive Language	The ability to understand information. It involves understanding the words, sentences and meaning of what others say or what is read.
Expressive Language	Being able to put thoughts into words and sentences, in a way that makes sense and is grammatically accurate.
Speech	The expression of ideas and thoughts by articulating vocal sounds.
Pragmatics	These are the skills that we use in our daily interactions with others. They vital for communicating our personal thoughts, ideas and feelings.

Is SLCN common?

Speech, Language and Communication Needs, or SLCN, is quite common. It is estimated that around 10% of students starting school have SLCN – that's approximately 2-3 in every classroom. (Afasic 2020). In some disadvantaged areas 50% students start school without the requisite language skills. (ICAN, 2020)

For more information, we highly recommend the following video.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZmArof-vgg
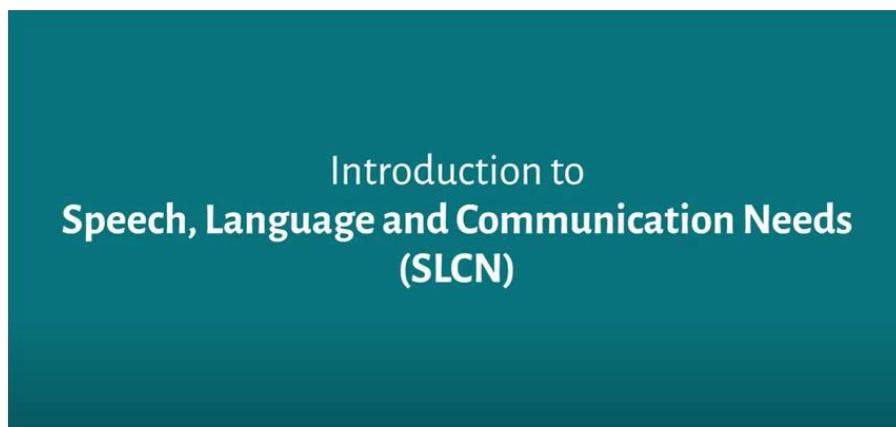
What is Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)?

Many of you may have heard the time developmental, language disorder or DLD, but what does it actually mean?

Developmental Language Disorder or DLD (previously known as Specific Language Impairment or SLI) is a persistent type speech, language and communication need that cannot be explained by an obvious cause.

DLD is not the only label that is used by professionals to describe unexplained difficulties with talking and understanding such as speech and language disorder and language learning impairment. This can be confusing for professionals.

DLD may be identified in students when their development of talking:

- falls behind that of other students of the same age
- interferes with everyday life and school achievement
- is not due to hearing loss, physical abnormality, acquired brain damage, or lack of language experience
- is not part of a general delay of development that affects all other skills.

You may notice that a student doesn't say very much, his/her talking seems immature, he/she may struggle to find the right words, and doesn't seem to understand what is said. Difficulties with talking are not always easy to spot and may be hidden behind difficulties with paying attention, following instructions or getting on with others.

(Afasic, 2020)

Raising Awareness in Developmental Language Disorders (RADLD) state that there are 2 students in every classroom with DLD. For further information regarding DLD we highly recommend the following two videos.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQ-s02HWLb0

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD): The consensus explained

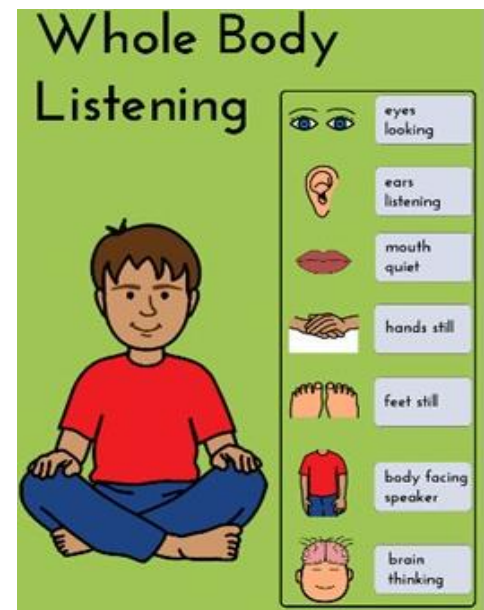https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZ1dHS1X8jg

Listening and Attention

Listening and Attention are essential for the development of speech, language, communication skills and learning. They enable us to focus on information and process it. If these skills are insecure, then what we build on them will be patchy and inconsistent as it lacks a stable base.

Strategies to promote listening and attention skills

- Make it easy for students to look at you
- Use the student's name so that they know that you want them to listen
- Consider the class seating arrangements
- Give learning/movement breaks-these only need to last 2 minutes e.g. getting a drink or putting something in the bin
- Explicitly teach students 'good listening skills'
- Keep language simple
- Use visual support
- Check information has been understood
- Refocus the student by saying their name
- Give specific praise e.g. great looking

Whole Body Listening
- eyes looking
- ears listening
- mouth quiet
- hands still
- feet still
- body facing speaker
- brain thinking

Receptive

Students with receptive language difficulties often struggle to understand words, sentences and the meaning of what others say. This includes:

- vocabulary
- grammar
- semantics (word meanings and connections)
- instructions
- questions
- stories
- inference
- implied meaning
- idioms and jokes
- remembering information

A student with receptive language difficulties may:

- avoid work by using distraction techniques e.g. going to the toilet or sharpening their pencil
- look blank, giggle, pull faces, cry, hide or hit out
- respond inappropriately
- echo or parrot other people's speech
- copy others
- change the subject
- present with literacy difficulties
- have poor listening and attention skills
- be unlikely to ask for help

Strategies

1. Ensuring the student is attending to you before speaking.

2. Cue the student in using their name.

3. Be aware of the complexity of language you are using with the student

4. Be aware of the language demands of the whole class

5. Simplify instructions, repeat them using the same language and use visual support/gestures

6. Allow pauses between sequencing commands (to allow processing time)

7. Encourage students to use strategies to process information e.g. explaining what they have to do to an adult or peer

8. Encourage students to tell you when they don't understand

9. Emphasise key words by using slight stress

10. Use multi-sensory approaches to teach vocabulary

Expressive

Students with expressive language difficulties find it hard to use words, sentences, speech and writing to convey meaning. This includes:

- Knowing/finding the vocabulary
- Putting words together into a sentence
- Using grammar correctly
- Constructing a narrative or story.
- Relating an event so that the listener understands what happened.
- Explaining and describing
- Using language to reason
- Generate novel utterances
- Difficulties saying what they mean
- Talking about an irrelevant topic

A student with expressive language difficulties may:

- Talk; too loudly, too quickly, too slowly or not at all
- Use few words
- Lots of gestures
- Miss out words
- Invent words
- Muddle or misuse syllables
- Muddles pronouns, tenses or questions
- Difficulties recounting events (sequencing)
- Lack of understanding of conversational rules
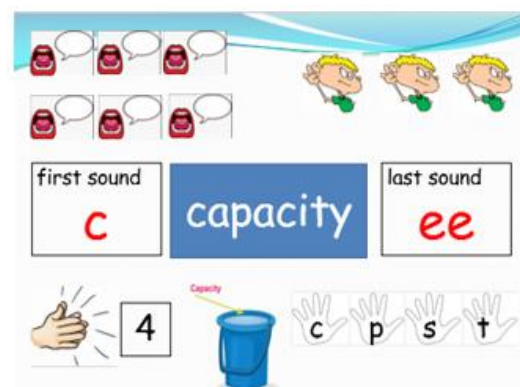
Strategies

1. Wait- give the student time to say what they mean

2. Comment more that question

One question to four...

Comments

Repetitions

Expansions

Explanations
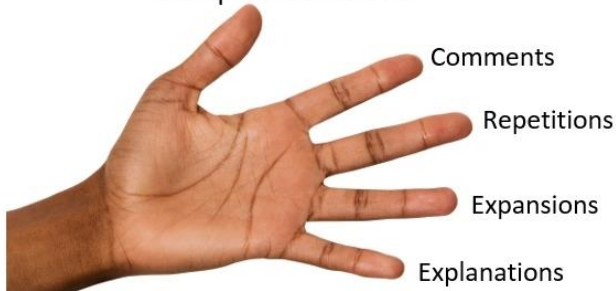
3. Ask open ended questions e.g. what did you do at the weekend?

4. Help students with word finding difficulties by promoting- forced alternatives, what does it look like? Can you show me? What do you do with it?

5. Barrier games

6. Opportunities to talk to peers (partners/group work) e.g. sharing weekend news

7. Ensure students can achieve success at tasks that don't rely on spoken language (gestures, drawings, drama)

8. Visual strategies

9. Manage the student's turn so they hear models of good language first
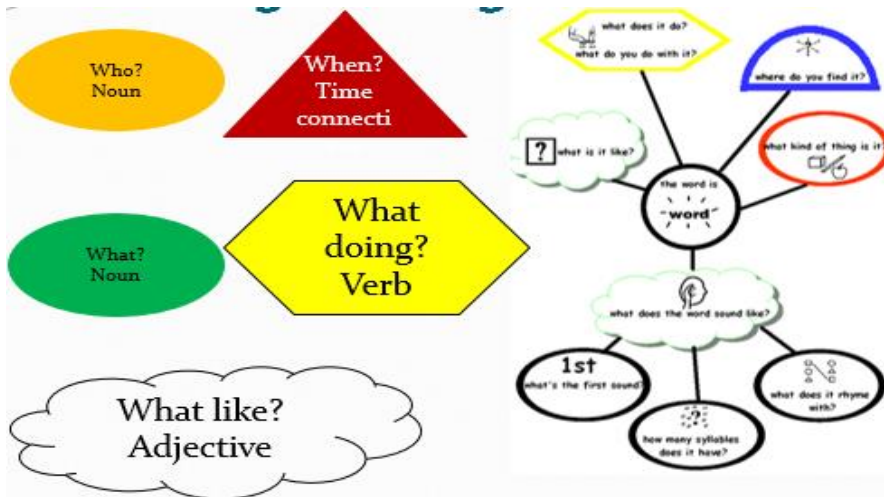
Speech

Speech difficulties are a type of speech, language and communication need (SLCN). Students may take longer to develop a range of speech sounds and need some help with their unclear speech. This may present as:

- Difficulty with telling the difference between sounds
- Difficulty with the articulation (making) of sounds
- Difficulty with combining sounds in words
- Difficulty saying longer words
- Difficulty with the rhythm, flow or 'tune' of speaking

Strategies

1. React to what the student says; not how clearly he/she speaks

Often students don't realise that they are mispronouncing words so correcting them is confusing

2. Repeat what the student says correctly so the student hears good examples e.g. *I like panish leshons- yes you like Spanish lessons at school*

3. Don't make the student repeat words-students need to feel relaxed and confident to experiment with sounds

4. Build self esteem

If part of the student's conversation is understood, repeat back. That way the student will feel some success (it may encourage them to tell you more).

5. Don't pretend to understand- ask the student to show you and encourage gestures/mime

Sometimes you have to admit that you don't understand. Play a game where a student has to act out the word without saying it to encourage this strategy-this could be fun as a group or whole class.

6. Students may be able to articulate a sound but not use it in a word- this is quite normal

The best strategy is to repeat the words correctly; however, sometimes SaLT is needed.

Pragmatics

Some students have difficulties with the social use of language, communicating with others and with interaction and play skills. Pragmatic skills include:

- Intelligibility and how a student uses their voice e.g. pitch, volume and intonation
- Non-verbal communication
- listening skills
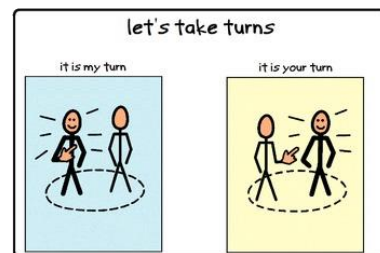- Awareness of the needs of the listener

- Turn taking
- Initiating, maintaining and completing a conversation

A student with pragmatic difficulties may:

- find it hard to understanding social language and the social rules of conversation
- struggle to make and maintaining friendships
- find it hard to understand/infer other people's feelings
- have difficulties understanding and using non-verbal communication e.g. eye contact or facial expressions
- struggle initiating conversations
- say things which are inappropriate
- talk too much and give details which are not necessary
- provide too little information or respond with one word answers
- find it hard to stay on topic in conversations

Strategies

1. Use social stories to model appropriate social behaviours and help a student understand what is happening/plan what to do

2. Use drama to practice social skills

3. Provide opportunities for students to develop turn taking skills in structured activities e.g. board games

4. Use talk partners and pair students with 'good models'

5. Provide opportunities for structured talk and use speaking frames/ sentence stems to scaffold student's thinking

6. Use a visual timetable to provide a consistent routine

7. A "Now /Next" board can help to give structure to a school day and support a student to handle activities that are not self-directed

8. Discuss any changes to the routine prior to it happening – back this up with visuals/a social story

let's take turns
it is my turn   it is your turn

I think that...

Talk Partners

Turn your body to face your partner
Sit with your legs crossed
Look at your partner
Take it in turns to talk to each other
Answer questions
Listen to your partner when they are talking.
Try not to talk over each other.
Ask questions
Give your opinion

Communication friendly environments

A communication friendly environment should make communication as easy, effective and enjoyable as possible. It should provide opportunities for everyone to talk, listen, understand and take part. A communication friendly environment will support the development of all students' communication skills including those with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). Developing a communication friendly environment helps remove barriers to communication. A communication friendly environment will also support learning, social and emotional development. (This information is taken from https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/643570/making_your_place_great_for_communication_final_1__june_2018.pdf)

A communication-friendly school is about the whole learning environment. It is not just about the building you are in or the types of resources and materials that you provide for the students. Communication-friendly settings: can be made with very few resources; do not require spacious, purpose-built accommodation. Communication-friendly schools are about the ways in which the adults listen to and talk with and interact and model speech with the students. (The Department for Students, Schools and Families, 2009. *Every Student is a Talker*)

Why do we need a communication friendly environment?

- To help students to understand things that are said to them
- To help you to understand what your student is telling you
- To help to reduce frustration, anxiety or challenging behaviour caused by not understanding the spoken language they hear.
- To support attention and listening skills
- To help students access lessons and activities
- To support memory skills
- To increase independence and confidence

How to make your environment more communication friendly

- Use more gestures e.g. beckoning somebody to ask them to come to you, pointing and looking more
- Use timers to let a student know how long they have to complete an activity
- Use objects of reference e.g. showing a test tube for Science
- Show objects, pictures and symbols to support understanding e.g. showing a piece of wood and some straw whilst learning about 'Anglo Saxon houses'
- Use a visual timetable
- Put in place a now / next board
- Change your tone of voice and facial expression to add meaning to what you say e.g. ask a question and have a puzzled expression on your face

The following checklist comes from The Communication Trust
https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/643573/communication_friendly_environments_checklist_june_2018.pdf

Communication friendly environments – checklist

You can use this simple checklist to think about how your environment supports children's communication.

Elements to consider

• Space, light and layout

☐ Is there good light, with a comfortable temperature and not too many visual distractions

• Noise levels

☐ Are noise levels conducive to learning – what can be done to minimise unnecessary noise?

• Use of visual support, this may include

☐ A colour coded map of school or setting , colour coded directions, photographs of staff members, photographs/ symbols used to support routines, eg washing hands, getting ready for PE

☐ Visual timetables used for daily / weekly activities

☐ Objects, pictures and symbols used to teach vocabulary, to make stories more active and support engagement in other lessons

☐ Displays are used throughout school or setting to support learning

• Adults who can prioritise communication, this may include adults who

☐ Have knowledge of language development.

☐ Understand the language levels of the children and the language demands in the environment.

☐ Can adapt their language so it is not a barrier to learning or communication.

☐ Give children strategies to say when they don't understand

• Routines

☐ Are children aware of rules and expectations?

☐ Do they know daily routines; could these be supported visually?

☐ Are children given opportunities within lessons to say when they don't understand?

☐ Are they explicitly taught how to listen, how to work together in groups?

☐ Are there opportunities for children to interact and use language in different situations, with different people at an appropriate level?

One of the most important elements in providing students with a 'Communication Friendly Environment' is the adults. To make your school communication-friendly, you should make sure that everyone responds positively and values all attempts at communication which may include non-verbal.

The importance of quality adult-student-interaction

The quality of the adult-student interaction can influence a student's opportunities to communicate and can facilitate language development.
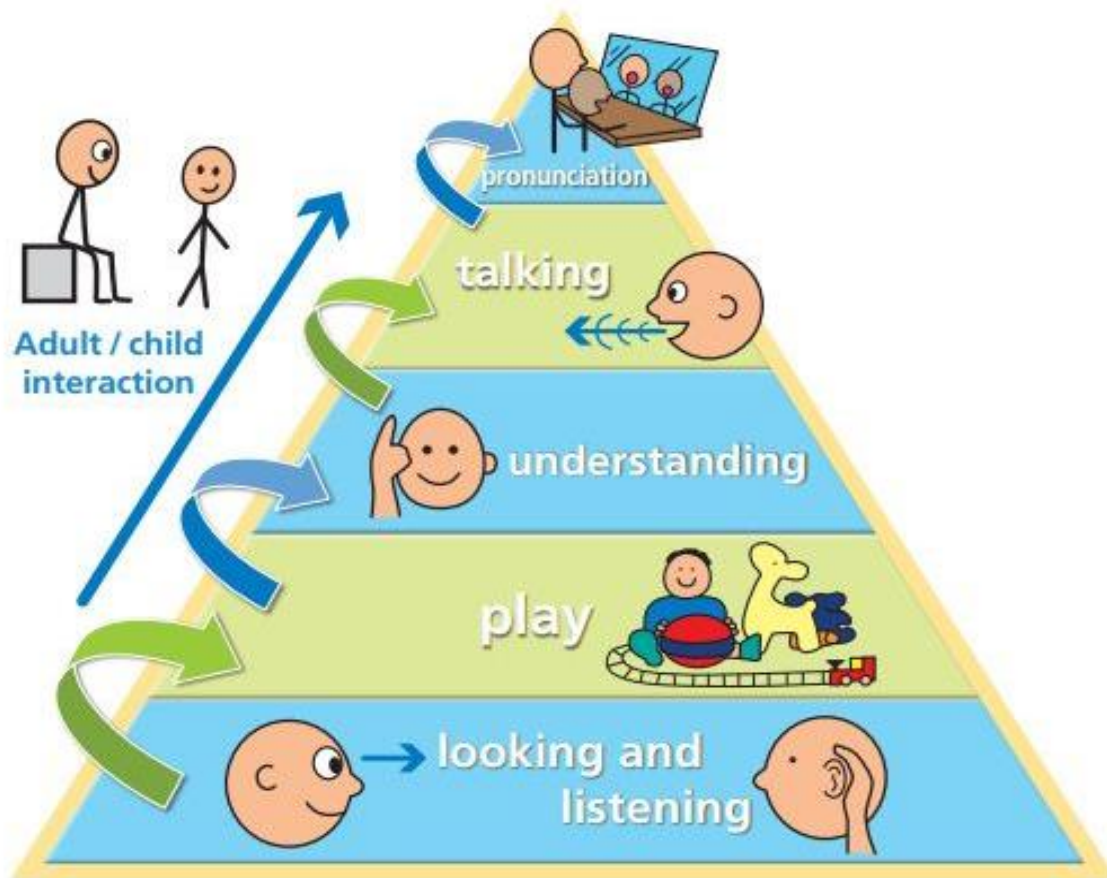
(Giroametto and Weizman 2002, Weislernald 2013- taken from Language Builders- ELKLAN)

The following pyramid shows the sequence of language development. An integral part of language development is 'adult-child-interaction'. Without quality adult -student interaction students' language learning will be negatively impacted.

We anticipate that for a significant number of students in our community the quality of adult-student-interaction could have declined since the COVID-19 outbreak in March. It is therefore imperative that as educational practitioners we support our students SLCN through high quality adult-student-interactions. This section may feel like 'teaching Grandma to suck eggs' however from our experience visiting a range of schools there is still a need to improve practitioners' interactions with students. Consequently, we have included a number or reminders, strategies and resources to develop practitioner's interaction with students.

The use of questioning vs the use of commenting

"Questions can be used to extend the student's thinking and learning, or simply to test. Testing young students by asking questions to which the teacher already knows the answer does not help support language development. Questions that are merely testing, e.g. 'What is an adverb?' or that invite simple 'yes' or 'no' answers can interrupt the flow of communication and stilt natural conversation. Students respond better to comments on their activity, e.g. 'You have drawn that flower carefully'. The commenting approach encourages the student to talk and keeps the student's attention on the task" (The Department for Students, Schools and Families, 2009. *Every Student is a Talker)*.

There are a number of ways that adults can comment and respond to students' talk to enable language learning.

Instead of asking the question you could use:

- Statements
- Echo, then extend
- Unfinished sentences
- Forced alternatives
- Be silly
- Say nothing – often as practitioners we are quick to fill in the empty silences, but for students who are reluctant talkers this can have a negative impact.

You may find the following tally chart useful in auditing adult-student interaction in your school.

	Asking questions	Giving directions or commands	Waiting for child to do or say something	Commenting on what the child is doing	Echo and extending	Statements	Unfinished sentences	Being silly
Number of times								
What was said								

Activity:_____ Created by Central Primary School Speech and Language Bases

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A useful way to remember to not use too many questions when interacting with students is 'The Hand Rule" created by ELKLAN.
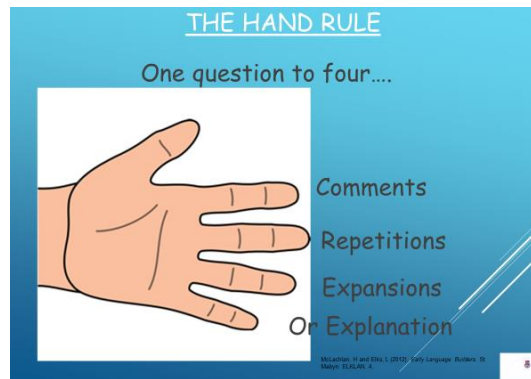
A fundamental part of developing practitioners practice is self-reflection. You may find it useful to reflect on what type of communicator you are when interacting with students. The Hannen Centre published a book called *'Learning Language and Loving It' (2011),* and discussed within this book is the roles of caregivers in supporting SLCN in students. Below you will find details on each of the six roles described in this book. You may find it beneficial to rate yourself according to which role you fit into.

The Director Role

- Adult maintains tight control
- Mostly adult talking – asking questions, giving instructions, making suggestions.
- Adult feels that asking questions or testing the student will help them to learn
- Tries to "get the student to talk"
- Difficult for the student to be spontaneous or be active in the interaction
- Gives students the message that they do not need to initiate – only respond!
- Students may be overwhelmed by the amount or complexity of language
- Student loses opportunities for self-discovery and practise

The Entertainer Role

- Adult is fun and amusing but usually does most of the talking or playing
- Students have few opportunities to actively participate in the interaction
- Often assume this role with students with language difficulties or those reluctant to interact

The Timekeeper Role

- Adults often rush through activities and routines – need to stick to timetables and deadlines
- Students can't keep up
- Limited interactions between the student and adult
- Adults may miss opportunities for interactions
- Student becomes more focused on tasks than people
- Particularly difficult for students with special needs or those who need longer to process or practice language

The 'too quiet' Practitioner Role

- Adult may be physically close to the student but they are not joining in with the play
- They may simply be watching or making occasional comments
- Adult may hardly interact with the student even when he/she initiates

- Often occurs with a student who does not seem interested in interacting or has his/her own agenda
- Students do need time to learn and explore on their own but in order to learn language they need to interact with adults

The Rescuer Practitioner Role

- When adults are too quick to help they may not realise how much a student can communicate
- When adults think a student will have difficulty with expression they will often talk for them
- Reduces both the adult's and the student's expectation of communication
- Student misses the chance to initiate communication or practice the skills he/she already has
- Student may become passive and reluctant to communicate or to try new things

The Responsive Practitioner Role

- Adult is tuned in to the student's interests, needs, language levels and abilities
- Most important role to play, though not possible to do it all the time
- Adult gives the student opportunities to start an interaction and then they respond with warmth and interest
- Student feels special and important
- Student can practice roles of both initiator and responder during interactions
- Student develops self-confidence necessary for learning
- Encourages student to be active in interactions with adults and peers

Useful links

- www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

- http://www.ican.org.uk/

- http://www.blacksheeppress.co.uk/

- http://www.elklan.co.uk/

- http://www.communication4all.co.uk/

- Clicker 6

- In Print (widget)

- Students's Speech & Language Therapy Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust

- www.afasic.org.uk