

# **Introduction to Speech and Language Therapy**

# What is Speech and Language Therapy?



- Speech and language therapists (SLTs) provide support and care for children and adults who have difficulties with communication, eating, drinking or swallowing.
- SLTs assess and work with people of all ages to help them communicate better.
- SLTs work directly with clients and their carers to provide person-centred support. We also work with teachers and other health professionals to develop support programmes.

# Where do SLTs work?



SLTs work together with children, adults, families, carers and the wider health professional workforce to support someone's communication or eating, drinking and swallowing.

We work in:

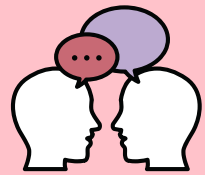
- Mainstream and Special Educational Needs schools
- Hospital wards and intensive care units
- Community health centres
- Day centres and nursing homes
- Visiting clients in their own homes
- Courtrooms and prisons



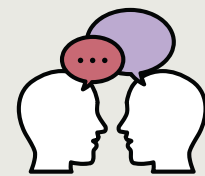
# Autism and communication

Autistic individuals exhibit a wide variety of communication styles, with both strengths and difficulties. Every single person is individual and unique.

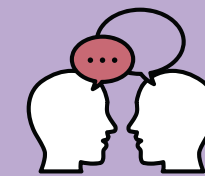
Typically for autistic individuals we can see difficulties with:



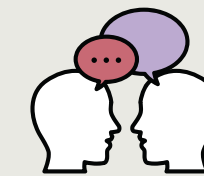
**Interpreting  
nonverbal cues**



**Social  
communication**



**Understanding  
abstract  
language**



**Processing  
verbal or  
written  
language**

# SLT support



SLTs work with autistic individuals, their parents/carers, other professionals and support staff so that autistic people can:

- express themselves, be understood and understand others to participate in their everyday life
- have their needs and preferences understood
- understand themselves, to self-advocate and support their own autonomy
- feel able to develop meaningful relationships

# A typical SLT session

An initial session will involve assessment of communication skills, including speech, language and social interaction. This will lead to goal setting and therapy planning, based on the child's needs.

## School

### Direct

- Working 1:1 or in a group with a child, doing activities to support their social communication development
- Introducing timetables or visual supports

### Indirect

- Meeting with the child's teacher or support staff to discuss support in the classroom
- Training a teaching assistant to deliver 1:1 support

## Outpatient clinic

### Direct

- Activities to promote social and language development
- Role-playing exercises to promote understanding of social cues and responses
- Using devices such as picture boards or tablets to aid communication

### Indirect

- Parent-mediated programmes: training for parents on how to encourage social communication development

# Supporting communication



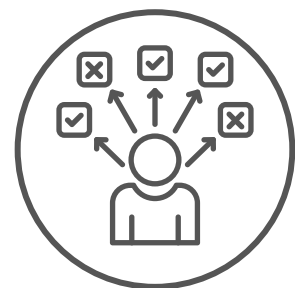
## Means

- speech
- signing/gesture
- facial expressions



## Reasons

- Communicating needs e.g., hunger, thirst, toileting
- Requesting/refusing
- Expressing emotion and social interaction



## Opportunities

- Supporting structures and routines
- Using visual aids
- Creating a calm and supportive communication environment

# Neurodiversity-affirming practice



- developing goals that are functional and individualised
- understanding the needs of the child and the family when creating a therapy plan
- providing therapy that is flexible and responsive to the child's needs and interests
- exploring communication modalities that are preferred and tailored - not pushing for verbal communication or eye contact

# Accessing SLT support



You can access SLT support for your child through the NHS by contacting:

- Your GP
- Your child's nursery/school teacher

They can refer you to your local NHS SLT service.

You can seek private SLT support through:

- The Association of Speech Therapists in Independent Practice (ASLTIP) website and fill out the referral form.

# References/resources

<https://www.rcslt.org/speech-and-language-therapy/>

<https://www.slt.co.uk/conditions/autism-spectrum-disorder/>

<https://www.hpft.nhs.uk/services/learning-disability-services/useful-resources/the-means-reasons-and-opportunities-model/>

<https://www.rcslt.org/speech-and-language-therapy/how-to-find-a-speech-and-language-therapist/#section-1>

<https://asltip.com/find-a-speech-therapist/>