

Guidance on accessing support for children's communication skills

June 2020

Use the table corresponding to the child's age to guide your decision making when signposting families for advice on a child's communication skills.

Decide upon the option for the column that shows the concern observed; the child does not need to meet all of the statements in this column.

You can use the Early Years Communication and Language Toolkit to help gather information to aid your decision making.

Your decision may also be **influenced by factors** such as parental level of concern, child's levels of frustration and family history of communication needs.

Use information about the **child's strongest language** when decision making.

Where there are concerns with **eating, drinking and swallowing, persistent stammering or voice difficulties**, please consider a direct referral to SALT services at any age 0-5 years.

The columns suggest signposting options, however you may also find other appropriate options using the **Talking Takes Off pathway**, which can be found [here](#).

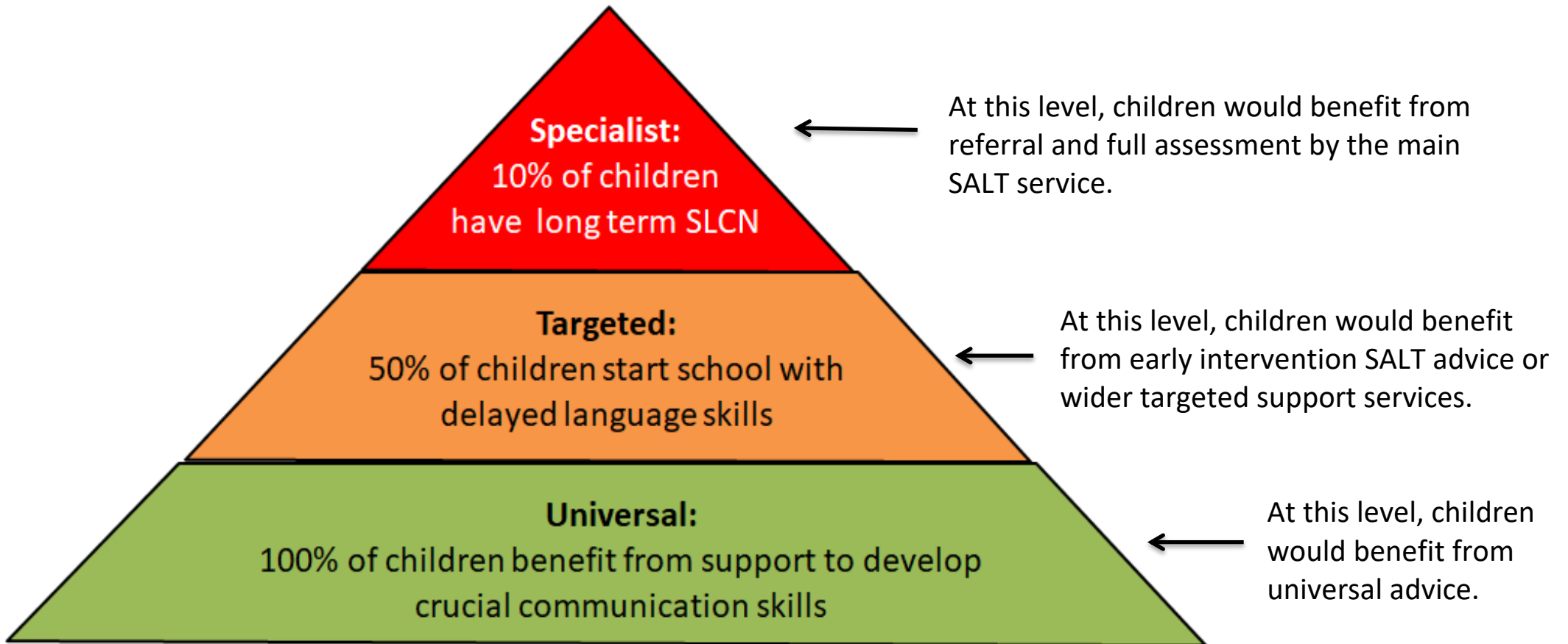
Where **direct referral to Speech and Language Therapy** is indicated, referral forms can be found on the local website, www.childspeechbedfordshire.nhs.uk

If there are wider concerns regarding the child's overall development and you are completing an **Edwin Lobo referral**, you can refer to SALT at the same time as the MDA.

Only one SALT referral should exist at a time, if the child requires direct referral to services, please do not also signpost to drop in or Talking Tots.



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12- 18 months

	Age appropriate - Universal Support: Signpost to universal services including Flying Start	Further concerns –Targeted support: Signpost to Talking Takes Off Drop In
Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Beginning to collect an item when requested	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not yet responding to familiar words, e.g. their name
Use of Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uses structured babble, e.g. bababa, mamama• Beginning to use first words, although they may not be pronounced correctly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not yet using simple non-verbal communication or babble sounds.
Interaction and Social Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responds with smiles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited responses to adults.

At this age, children may require specialist support as part of a wider package of care, or from transfer by the SALT who initially sees the child at a targeted level.

Guidance on accessing support for children's communication skills

18 months - 2 years

	Age appropriate - Universal Support:	Some concerns – start targeted support:	Further concerns – higher level targeted support:	Significant concerns – Specialist Support:
	Signpost to universal services including Flying Start	Signpost to Talking Takes Off group	Signpost to Talking Tots/Talking Takes Off Drop In	Direct referral to Speech and language Therapy
Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Picks out objects on request Responds to simple instructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not yet following simple instructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not yet showing understanding of single words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not responding to routine instructions, e.g. not realising it is bath time when the tap is running or time to go out when the door is opened
Use of Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using single words to communicate, mostly object words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not yet using single words, but communicating non-verbally Using learnt or copied words only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not yet using single words and using limited non-verbal communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not yet using simple non-verbal communication or babble sounds
Interaction and Social Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plays alone, not yet interested in others play Using some pretend play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has had limited social contact with peers Shows little interest in toys and others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential social communication concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not look to parent to share experiences

Guidance on accessing support for children's communication skills

Age 2 years - 2 years 6 months

	Age appropriate - Universal Support:	Some concerns – start targeted support:	Further concerns – higher level targeted support:	Significant concerns – Specialist Support:
	Signpost to universal services including Flying Start	Signpost to Talking Takes Off group	Signpost to Talking Tots/Talking Takes Off Drop In	Direct referral to Speech and language Therapy
Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently collects two items when requested 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently collects one item when requested. Requires visual support to carry out instructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unable to follow simple instructions, even with visual support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unable to point out family members/ familiar people Does not respond to their name
Use of Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses 2 words in a phrase, e.g. "more banana" consistently Speech sounds may still be unclear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A range of single words used. May be beginning to link two words together, e.g. "more water" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small number of single words used Using non-verbal communication to support their words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be using some non-verbal communication May be using learnt phrases copied from TV, these are not used in interaction
Interaction and Social Communication		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has had limited social contact with peers Is initiating and responding to interaction with parents effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiating interaction to request, e.g. pointing or leading parents by the hand to what they want 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows little interest in toys or play Not initiating or responding to interaction

Guidance on accessing support for children's communication skills

Age 2 years 6 months - 2 years 11 months

	Age appropriate - Universal Support:	Some concerns – start targeted support:	Further concerns – higher level targeted support:	Significant concerns – Specialist Support:
	Signpost to universal services including Flying Start	Signpost to Talking Takes Off group	Signpost to Talking Tots/Talking Takes Off Drop In	Direct referral to Speech and language Therapy
Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beginning to collect three items when requested 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently collects two items when requested 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unable to follow simple instructions out of context Requires visual support to carry out simple instructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unable to point out family members/ familiar people Does not respond to their name Does not respond to routine instructions with visual supports
Use of Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently using 2 word phrases Beginning to use 3 words in a phrase, e.g. "me more milk" Speech may still be unclear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A wide range of single words used and beginning to use some two word phrases, e.g. "more banana" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single words used consistently, but a limited range and number of words used Relying on non-verbal communication to support their words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not using any words or a small number of single words. May be using some non-verbal communication May be using learnt phrases copied from TV, these are not used in interaction
Interaction and Social Communication		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has had limited social contact with peers Is initiating and responding to interaction with parents effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiating interaction to request, e.g. pointing or leading parents by the hand to what they want 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows little interest in toys or play Not initiating or responding to interaction

Guidance on accessing support for children's communication skills

Age 3 years – 3 years 6 months

	Age appropriate - Universal Support: Signpost to universal services including Flying Start	Further concerns – Targeted Support: Signpost to Talking Tots/Talking Takes Off Drop In	Significant concerns – Specialist Support: Direct referral to Speech and language Therapy
Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collects up to 3 items that are requested 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently collects one item when requested Requires adult support to carry out instructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unable to follow simple instructions or collect one item when instructed, even with visual support Unable to point out familiar objects Unable to understand and follow setting routine, especially changes to the normal routine
Use of Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses 3-4 words together in a sentence Uses language to describe objects, e.g. "big", "soft" or where things are, e.g. "on", "under" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using 2 word phrases, e.g. "more banana" Using a range of object and action words (nouns and verbs) but not yet describing words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using single words Using mostly object words and few basic action words Using learnt phrases copied from TV or other people rather than their own language
Interaction and Social Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beginning to use imaginative play Using parallel play Initiates conversation & is able to take 2/3 turns in a conversation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absence of imaginative play Beginning to notice peers Show a preference for physical play, e.g. choosing bikes over small world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follows their own agenda in play Appears isolated in setting, interactions with peers may be physical Shows little awareness or interest of new people and their environment

Guidance on accessing support for children's communication skills

Age 3 years 6 months – 3 years 11 months

	Age appropriate - Universal Support: Signpost to universal services including Flying Start	Further concerns – Targeted Support: Signpost to Talking Tots/Talking Takes Off Drop In	Significant concerns – Specialist Support: Direct referral to Speech and language Therapy
Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collects up to 3 items that are requested Understands when and why questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently collects up to two items when requested. Requires adult support to carry out instructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unable to follow simple instructions or collect one item when instructed, even with visual support Unable to point out familiar objects Unable to understand and follow setting routine, especially changes to the normal routine
Use of Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses 4 - 6 words together in a sentence Uses language for a range of purposes e.g. to express ideas and feelings Asks a lot of questions, especially 'how' and 'why' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using 3 words together in a sentence Using language mostly to request, not to share feelings or comment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using two word phrases Using mostly object words and few basic action words Using learnt phrases copied from TV or other people rather than their own language
Interaction and Social Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using imaginative play Prefers to play in group of 3-4 children & seeks out friendships. Initiates conversation & is able to take turns in a conversation; changing topics Is aware of others & able to show empathy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emerging imaginative play Beginning to seek out others to play with Show a preference for physical play, e.g. choosing bikes over small world Finds it difficult to take turns and share 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follows their own agenda in play Absence of imaginative play Appears isolated in setting, interactions with peers may be physical Shows little awareness or interest of new people and their environment

Guidance on accessing support for children's communication skills

Age 4 years – 4 years 11 months

	Age appropriate - Universal Support:	Further concerns – Targeted Support:	Significant concerns – Specialist Support:
	Signpost to universal services including Flying Start	Signpost to Talking Tots/Talking Takes Off Drop In	Direct referral to Speech and language Therapy
Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands sequencing words e.g. first, after, last Understanding more complex position words, e.g. above / below / between and adjectives, e.g. soft / hard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently collects 3 items when requested, but not 4 Some delay in responding but does so appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restricted understanding of words and concepts Unable to collect 2 items on request Inability to follow discussion
Use of Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can explain meaning of simple words Can describe similarities and differences Some grammatical errors persist e.g. irregular plurals, e.g. 'sheeps' / past tense e.g. 'goed' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confusion of pronouns, e.g. he/his/him Finds it difficult to use connecting words, e.g. then, and, but 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses 2-3 word phrases Able to talk about the here and now but finds it difficult to talk about the past and future Using learnt phrases copied from TV or other people rather than their own language
Interaction and Social Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imaginative play becomes more sophisticated and interactive Can initiate, maintain and change a topic of conversation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing simple imaginative play Plays alongside other children but not with them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follows their own agenda in play Appears isolated in setting, interactions with peers may be physical Will interact with their peers with support from a key person Interacts non-verbally with their peers

Guidance on accessing support for children's communication skills

Speech Sound Guidance:

Age	Age Appropriate: Universal advice	Some Concerns: Targeted Support indicated	Significant Concerns: Make a referral to Speech & Language Therapy
2;6 – 3;0	Using m n p b t d h w	Speech sounds are still emerging and errors may still be common	No consonant sounds or very limited consonant sounds Unusual sounding vowels Child is missing off the first sound in many words
3;0 – 3;6	Using m n p b t d h w And k g ng f s y	Speech sounds are still emerging and errors may still be common Child is replacing quiet sounds with loud sounds e.g. 'bear' for 'pear' Child is missing off end sounds in words e.g. 'bee' for 'beak'	Child is not understood by familiar listeners No consonant sounds or very limited consonant sounds Unusual sounding vowels Child is missing off the first sound in many words
3;6 – 4;6	Using m n p b t d h w k g ng f s y And v z l sh ch	Speech sounds are still emerging and errors may still be present Child replaces back sounds with front sounds e.g. 'tat' for 'cat' and 'dir' for 'girl' Child replaces long sounds with short sounds e.g. 'dun' for 'sun' and 'bore' for 'four'	Persisting difficulty with m n p b t d h w Child is becoming frustrated or reluctant to talk Child is not understood by familiar listeners No consonant sounds or very limited consonant sounds Unusual sounding vowels Child is missing off the first sound in many words
4;6 – 5;0	Using m n p b t d h w k g ng f s y v z l sh ch And j and consonant blend sounds e.g. sm pr fl	Children should only have a few age appropriate errors present and should be understood by unfamiliar listeners Child replaces consonant clusters with single sounds e.g. 'mall' for 'small' and 'geen' for 'green'	Persisting difficulty with m n p b t d h w k g ng f s. Child is becoming frustrated or reluctant to talk Child is not understood by familiar listeners No consonant sounds or very limited consonant sounds Unusual sounding vowels Child is missing off the first sound in many words

Children with EAL –

Age appropriate: no concerns from parents or bilingual assistants/ TAs about child's speech inventory in first language

Some concerns: some concerns from parents or bilingual assistants/TAs over child's speech skills in first language

Significant concerns: persistent sound errors observed in all languages