

Information for Parents/Guardians of Children and Young People with Specific Speech and Language Disorders

The aim of this pamphlet is to inform parents and guardians of supports and services available for children and young people with Specific Speech and Language Disorders and their families.



What is a specific speech and language disorder (SSLD)?

While most children learn to speak and understand language at about the same age, some children may be slower than others to develop language and to interact with others. Most young children make mistakes when they are learning to talk and confuse words and sounds. This is a part of typical language development and in most cases these errors are sorted out by the time the child is three to four years of age.

In some cases, early problems with speech and language persist and children can end up having a range of different speech, language and/or communication difficulties, which have different underlying causes and vary from very mild to severe levels of difficulty.

Children with specific speech and language disorder (SSLD) have very particular difficulties with language and /or speech development which are not caused by any other condition. For instance, children with an intellectual disability or children who are deaf or hard of hearing may have problems with language development, but these are not specific speech and language disorders as there are other underlying causes for the difficulties in these cases. These children require support but do not have SSLD.

Children with SSLD score in the average or above average range on an intelligence test but have great difficulty in developing and using language.

They can have receptive language disorders (difficulty in understanding language) or expressive language disorders (difficulties with speaking or expression). They may be reluctant to speak and take part in groups so that it can sometimes be harder for these children to make friends and interact with others.

How do I find out if my child has a SSLD?

Two professionals are required to make the diagnosis. A speech and language therapist assesses a child's language and a psychologist assesses the child's overall ability. Your child will be diagnosed as having a SSLD if:

- he/she scores in the average or above average range of non-verbal ability on an intelligence test
- he/she has moderate to severe level of language impairment on a standardised test of language
- other causes of the language disorder have been ruled out.

The Early Days

Generally pre-school children are screened by the public health nurse for language developmental delays.

If you are worried about your child's speech and language development you should seek help as soon as possible.

These difficulties can affect a child's self-esteem and self-image. But do take into account that young children develop language at different rates and at different levels.

People nowadays often use the Internet as a source of information. Please bear in mind that sometimes information on the internet can be exaggerated, misleading or wrong. In matters concerning your child's health and education, you should seek information and advice from the appropriate professional sources.

Getting Support

Children can be referred to HSE primary care speech and language services by GPs, public health nurses or parents. After taking into account the concerns expressed, your child may be offered an initial assessment. This will help to identify the nature and extent of any speech or language delay that is present.

Based on this assessment, your child may be prioritised for speech and language therapy, if this is required.

Referral may also be made to community psychology services for further investigation.

Assessment of Need

Parents of any child born after 1st June 2002 may apply to the HSE for an Assessment of Need under the Disability Act, if they think that their child may have a disability. Following the assessment, parents receive an Assessment Report stating their child's needs and the services required to meet those needs. More information about the assessment of need process is available on the HSE website at www.hse.ie.

If your child is at school, you may wish to raise your concerns with your child's teacher or school principal.

The school may be able to support you and/or reassure you about your child's speech and language.

If needed, the school may advise that your child should be referred to a NEPS psychologist or to primary care speech and language services, if this has not already happened. Parents/guardians or the school can make contact directly with speech and language services.

A child with a specific speech and language disorder can really benefit from speech and language therapy. Where a speech and language therapist is involved with a child, s/he may link with the class or support teacher to help to develop a programme to address your child's needs. It is useful to share any available information, such as speech and language assessment reports, with the school so that this information can be used in planning your child's education.

Your Child's Education

Pre-school Age

The State funds a free pre-school place for all eligible children in the year prior to starting school through the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, more details are available on www.dcy.gov.ie. Children with specific speech and language disorders, who have additional needs, may also be eligible to attend other HSE funded crèche or pre-school settings.

School Going Age

Department of Education and Skills: Policy

The Department's policy is focused on ensuring that all children, including those with specific speech and language disorders, can have access to an education appropriate to meeting their needs and abilities. The policy is to provide for children with special educational needs to be included in mainstream schools unless such a placement would not be in their best interests or the interests of the children with whom they are to be educated. Some children with more complex special educational needs may be supported in a special class in a mainstream school. These children have the option, where appropriate, of full or part-time inclusion and interaction with other children. Other children may have such complex needs that they are best placed in a special school.

Primary and Post Primary School

The vast majority of children with specific speech and language disorders attend their local mainstream primary and post-primary schools, with support. The education system supports children and young people with specific speech and language disorders in the following ways:

- The classroom teacher supports students with special educational needs and may adapt lessons or tasks to suit the individual, as necessary.
- Resource and learning teachers are available to provide additional teaching, if it is required.
- Students who have significant care needs arising from diagnosed special educational needs may have access to support from special needs assistants (SNAs). It is unusual for children with specific speech and language disorders to require access to SNA support unless there are other difficulties present. The circumstances in which SNAs are allocated are detailed in Circular 0030/2014, available on the DES website at www.education.ie
- Additional supports such as assistive technology (see DES Circular 0010/2013) may also be provided where children are eligible.

- Reasonable Accommodation in Certificate Examinations (RACE) may be available. For more information, see the website of the State Examinations Commission at: www.examinations.ie/
- Information about DES schemes is available on the DES website at: www.education.ie.

Students with SSLD may attend a special class for a period of one or two years.

These special classes have a low pupil teacher ratio and are supported directly by speech and language therapy in school. You may wish to speak to your child's teacher or speech and language therapist or SENO about the availability of such a class in your area and/or the need for your child to attend.

Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs)

SENOs provide information directly to the parents of children/young people with special educational needs and to schools. SENOs approve additional teaching and SNA supports to schools, where necessary, to support students with special educational needs. SENOs also have a role in supporting and advising parents/guardians. Your SENO can assist you in a number of ways by:

- Providing support and advice.
- Identifying possible school placements.
- Liaising with the school, the HSE and other services.
- Assisting in planning the transition of children to school, between schools and onwards from school.

Your local SENO may be contacted through the school or from the NCSE website at www.ncse.ie.

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

NEPS psychologists work with parents, teachers and children to help all children develop to their potential.

A parent leaflet about the NEPS service is available on the DES website at: www.education.ie/en/Parents/Information/Educational-Psychological-Services.

Further Information

Further information for parents/guardians can be found in the NCSE publications:

- ***Children with Special Educational Needs: Information Booklet for Parents***
- ***Choosing a School: A Guide for Parents and Guardians of Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs***
- ***Post-School Education and Training Information on Options for Adults and School Leavers with Disabilities***

These publications are available at www.ncse.ie.

Useful Contacts

Your local **SENO** may be contacted through the school or from the NCSE website at www.ncse.ie.

Department of Education and Skills: www.education.ie.

Local health centre: www.hse.ie.

Information about other supports to which you may be entitled are available on the website of **Citizens Information** at: www.citizensinformation.ie or from the relevant Government Departments.

The following websites and support organisations may also be of assistance to you:

National UK Literacy Trust: www.literacytrust.org.uk.

Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists: www.iaslt.ie.

I CAN Help: www.ican.org.uk.

National Parents Council Primary: www.npc.ie.

National Parents Council Post-Primary: www.npcpp.ie.

Psychological Society of Ireland: www.psihq.ie.

Special Needs Parents Association: www.specialneedsparents.ie.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive and these organisations are listed only for information purposes. The National Council for Special Education may have had no involvement with these organisations and cannot vouch for them or their staff. Parents should always satisfy themselves regarding the appropriateness of providing any information concerning their child to any third-party.



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