

# Children who have Social Communication Disorder

Each child who has SCD presents with a unique profile of strengths and needs. It is common to see children who have differing levels of difficulty across a variety of language, pragmatic and social features of language use.

Children who find it hard to understand and use language, especially in social situations, have been described using different terminology over the years. They are now described as having Social Communication Disorder (SCD) or Pragmatic Language Impairment (PLI).

## What do we know about the features of SCD?

Children who have SCD might:

- be very talkative or very quiet
- change topic too often or have a favourite topic which they talk about a lot
- be too friendly or too formal in their speech and interactions
- misunderstand idioms and not pick up on hints
- not recognise that they have not understood what has been said and/or hinted at

In addition, children who have SCD may find it hard to:

- understand their own and other people's thoughts and feelings
- match their behaviour to the social situation they find themselves in

## Why is SCD sometimes called a 'hidden' communication disorder?

Children who have SCD may appear to have very little difficulty with communication because their speech is usually clear and they can be chatty and friendly.

Children may not show clear signs of SCD until they are perhaps 7 years of age, or even older. However, what they have in common is that they make mistakes when using language for conversation, giving information, and making relationships.

As children who have SCD get older, they can find it hard to make friends, learn and succeed at school, apply for and keep a job and look after themselves and others. Becoming an independent adult if you have SCD can be challenging. Some young people need support from family and health and social care services. This can be expensive to provide.

In our work with these children, their parents/carers have told us repeatedly that early, specialist communication intervention is essential in helping their children to express themselves and make friends.

SCIP<sup>2</sup> will help us find out how best to design a large-scale trial of the SCIP manual intervention.

## What should you do if you think your child might have an SCD?

If you have concerns about your child's language, pragmatic and social communication skills please contact your local speech and language therapy service where you will be given information about referring your child for assessment. The SCIP<sup>2</sup> team cannot accept referrals or give advice.

## How have parents described their child's SCD to us in previous research?

### Understanding and using language

"He has difficulty understanding spoken instructions. This makes learning and playing games difficult."

"He can't explain a situation clearly. He doesn't give enough information or it's all mixed up."

"He takes things very literally and can get into trouble as a result. More abstract ideas are a problem."

### Social interaction

"He has no sense of danger and will talk to, or even hug, strangers."

"She will say things that are hurtful without meaning to."

### School issues

"He says he feels sick in the morning and is stressed going to school."

"I want him to be able to access the school curriculum just to get basic skills."

### Understanding feelings

"He needs to learn to deal with negative situations and manage stress and anger. Frustration builds up."

"She can easily overreact to the smallest thing and it takes a long time to calm down."

### Friendships

"She has trouble making new friends. When she plays with her peers she always invades their space."

"I'm worried about him not being able to make friends or being lonely. He only plays computer games."

### Social situations

"Changing routines can be very stressful."

She doesn't like unexpected events and needs pre-warning about everything. We see signs of anxiety throughout the day."

### Behaviour

"His inappropriate behaviour and tantrums are very difficult to deal with."

"He tries to behave appropriately, but if he gets bored he'll sing or lie down no matter where we are."

### Conversation

"Talking obsessively about her favourite topics can be very draining."

"He is always polite but doesn't know how to join in a conversation. I want him to learn social rules."