



STATEMENT

Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision, 6 December 2017

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists welcomes the publication of **Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision**. We support the Green Paper's fundamental principle that 'All young people deserve the best start in life'.

Communication skills are fundamental and foundational. They are central to expression (making ourselves understood), comprehension (understanding what is being said to and asked of us) and to knowing how to speak to different people in the right kind of way at the right time (social communication).

Research has found that many children and young people with mental health needs have difficulties with speech, language, communication and interaction. These difficulties are often unidentified. 81% of children with emotional and behavioural disorders have significant language deficits.¹ In addition, at least 60% of children and young people in touch with youth justice services present with speech, language and communication difficulties.² Severe and pervasive communication impairment, much of it previously unidentified, has been found in children and young people in residential care.³

Unidentified and unsupported difficulties put children and young people at risk of poorer mental health.

- children with vocabulary difficulties at age five are three times as likely to have mental health problems when they reach adulthood.⁴
- children with language difficulties have an impoverished quality of life in terms of moods and emotions and are more at risk in terms of social acceptance and bullying.⁵
- people with a primary communication impairment are at greater risk of a secondary mental health disorder, commonly anxiety or depression.⁶

These difficulties can also create significant barriers to people being able to access and benefit from assessments and treatments that are verbally mediated, such as talking therapies. These put a significant demand on language processes both expressive and receptive.

It is essential, therefore, that any difficulties children and young people may have with speech, language, communication and interaction are identified as early as possible and responded to appropriately. This will help prevent the development of mental health problems and improve access to services.

Specifically on the role of education settings in promoting children and young people's mental health, in our response to the Education and Health Select Committee's inquiry **Children and young people's mental health – the role of education**, we recommended:

- **Whole-system approach:** communication should be everybody's business. Education settings should be inclusive communication environments in which barriers to communication and interaction are removed and classrooms and lesson materials are differentiated and accessible.
- **Identification:** support for children and young people with mental health problems should include identification of communication and interaction difficulties and access to speech and language therapy services where appropriate, both for a full assessment where this is necessary and for intervention where appropriate.
- **Training:** to build the skills of professionals, any training on mental health for those working in educational settings should include training and support to promote language development and to identify and support those with communication and interaction difficulties.

Kamini Gadhok, Chief Executive of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists said today, 'We welcome the Green Paper. In our response, we will be highlighting that the early identification and appropriate response to children and young people's difficulties with speech, language, communication and interaction will promote better mental health, prevent the development of mental health problems, and improve access to services. In turn, this will help ensure that children and young people have the best start in life.'

Read RCSLT's factsheet on supporting mental health and wellbeing:

https://www.rcslt.org/speech_and_language_therapy/docs/factsheets/mental_health

Read RCSLT's submission to the Education and Health Select Committees' inquiry into 'Children and young people's mental health – the role of education':

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/health-committee/children-and-young-peoples-mental-healththe-role-of-education/written/45650.pdf>

Notes

1 Hollo A, Wehby JH and Oliver RM. (2014) Unidentified Language Deficits in Children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: A Meta-Analysis, *Exceptional Children*; 80(2): 169-186.

2 Bryan K, Freer J, and Furlong C. (2007) Language and communication difficulties in juvenile offenders, *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*; 42, 505-520.

3 McCool S and Stevens IC (2011) Identifying speech, language and communication needs among children and young people in residential care, *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* 46(6): 665-74.

4 Law J et al (2009), Modelling developmental language difficulties from school entry into adulthood: literacy, mental health, and employment outcomes, *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research*, 52(6): 1401-16.

5 Lindsay G, Dockrell J (2012), The relationship between speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD), Department for Education research report DFE-RR247-BCRP6. <http://tinyurl.com/p8yhpsa>.

6 Botting N, Durkin K, Toseeb U, Pickles A, Conti-Ramsden G. (2016), Emotional health, support, and self-efficacy in young adults with a history of language impairment, *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 34, 538–554.

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