



Speaking out for young people with speech, language and communication needs

More than 60% of young offenders have speech, language and communication needs. It is therefore safe to assume that any young person you are working with has communication needs until proven otherwise.

Impact

- Many young people have difficulty understanding vocabulary commonly used in the justice system and in courts, such as the words “remorse”, “victim” and “breach”.
- Offender treatment programmes are largely verbally mediated. Evidence shows that around 40% of offenders find it difficult or are unable to access and benefit from verbally mediated interventions such as anger management and drug rehabilitation courses.

Young offenders may have a range of speech, language and communication needs. These include problems:

- Expressing themselves through speaking, writing or non-verbal communication.
- Understanding and using language to communicate.
- Understanding spoken or written words, body language and facial expressions.
- Listening to what is being said to them.
- Remembering information.
- Expressing feelings and emotions in an appropriate way, eg they may use aggressive behaviour instead of words to express themselves.
- Relating to others in socially acceptable ways.

How speech and language therapy services can help?

Providing speech and language therapy significantly improves the communication skills of young offenders, reduces the risk of reoffending, increases access to rehabilitation and treatment programmes, and can improve an individual’s chances of gaining employment.

Communication tips

- Use simple clear language, avoid jargon and explain abbreviations.
- Use open questions to encourage more detailed responses.
- Speak a little slower than you would normally do.
- Give extra time for the young person to listen and process the information.
- Make written materials simple and clear.
- Think about the language you use:
 - Many young people do not understand terms such as “breach, “custody” or “remorse”.
 - Using alternative words and phrases or explaining what they mean will help .
- Find out if people have understood. Ask the young person to repeat back in their own words what you have said.

Speech and language therapy can help offenders to:

- Develop language skills for daily life.
- Take part in a conversation, by appreciating turn taking.
- Develop their vocabulary and the way they put sentences together.
- Use techniques to express their feelings and emotions.
- Deal with the triggers that spark anti-social behaviour.
- Find ways to overcome drug-related, short-term memory problems.
- Deal with authority figures, e.g. coping at interview.
- Understand and be understood by prison staff.
- Cope better with the social challenges faced in institutional life.
- Improve non-verbal communication skills expressed in e.g. body language.

Resources to help

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) has developed **The Box**, a training programme to help professionals in the criminal justice system.

The Box includes an e-learning module, a two-day course and a screening tool to help staff:

- Recognise speech, language and communication needs.
- Understand how issues caused by these needs can impact on their work.
- Develop practical skills to overcome or improve these challenges.

Visit: www.theboxtraining.com to find out more