Points to consider for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs returning to school after the COVID-19 lockdown

Many families and schools are making decisions about returning to school following the lockdown. This is an individual decision to be made following government and expert advice. The purpose of this document is to highlight further steps to support children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), including those with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). The strategies will support a wider group of learners.

For all situations

- Support information with **visuals**, such as photos, or symbols (see widgit.com, or arasaac.org or Twinkl create for free versions). Videos may also be useful. By having simple written or visual information children and young people can go over it. Many find this reassuring as language can be too much to take in at the same time, especially when feeling anxious. A photo or video of the class layout and the staff will have more impact than the written form.
- Divide the information into **small chunks**. For instance, have one key point per page.
- Say that the situation may change, but they will be kept **informed**.
- Acknowledge **emotions**. Emphasise differences and similarities for people.
- Outline **support** (who and how) and encourage questions. It may be appropriate to set up regular check in sessions.
- Work closely: **schools and families together**. Everyone will be a little anxious, so everyone needs to remember to be kind.

If returning to school

- Give children **notice** and explain why they are going to school and why others are not. Countdown calendars may be of benefit.
- Explain the new rules and processes **ahead of time**. Send these to families so they can go through them with their children. Start with basics such as start and finish times, who will be at school and lunch arrangements.
- Explain the new rules **one at a time**. Make it clear which are 'must dos' and why

If not returning to school

- Use the strategies listed under 'for all situations.' Additionally, it may be useful to let them know of others who are in the same situation, to emphasise they are not alone.

On return to school

- Establish **clear routines**. Present new rules and timetables visually. Use photos and pictures wherever possible. Go over these many times, both as a class and individually if possible. Send home beforehand if possible.

- If changes need to be made to the routine, explain these ahead of time. A **morning update** of any changes may be useful.
- Allow time for more **physical breaks**. Many children may not be used to sitting on hard chairs for a while.
- When conveying important information, **keep language VERY simple**. Use basic, everyday words, short sentences, and long pauses. Repeat. There will be so much going on that many children with SLCN will have trouble taking in new information.
- Give children **time to talk**. As well as chat, some degree of structure may be helpful. It might be as simple as, 'finish this sentence: 'one thing I missed about school when we were not here was …'
- Prioritise **relationships**. Children and young people with DLD and SLCN will need to feel safe before they can learn optimally.
- Spend time developing **emotional awareness** in self and others. Spend time discussing how each is feeling. Explore this via physical means such as play, drama and painting.

Most children with Developmental Language Disorder have not been identified, so use these strategies with any vulnerable learners, with or without a diagnosis.

To learn more about Developmental Language Disorder go to **radld.org** or **naplic.org.uk/dld**.

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