

Speech and Language Therapists - Profession specific descriptor for registered professionals and support workers

Speech and language therapists (SLTs) provide life-improving interventions, support and care for children and adults who have difficulties with communication, eating, drinking or swallowing. SLTs assess and treat speech, language and communication problems in people of all ages to help them communicate better. They also assess, treat and develop personalised plans to support people who have eating, drinking and swallowing problems. Using specialist skills, SLTs work directly with clients and their carers and provide them with tailored support. They also work closely with teachers and other health professionals.

Wider Determinants

Speech and language therapists (SLTs) work across all age groups, health settings and in education and social care. They are uniquely placed to provide interventions that make a difference to the health and wellbeing of people at local level, and to co-ordinate with other healthcare providers; addressing health inequalities and undertaking a range of prevention work particularly as part of multi-disciplinary teams.

SLTs work to support children and young people who are at greater risk of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) which may impact on their educational achievement as well as their emotional wellbeing and mental health and future life chances. This includes children and young people who live in areas of social disadvantage, as well as children and young people who are in touch with the social care system or the justice system. Speech and language therapy is delivered through collaborative working, supporting the child within the context of the home, early years and educational settings, and the wider community by working closely with and/or training other people involved.

SLTs also support babies and children who have feeding, swallowing and SLCN as part of another condition, for example children born with cerebral palsy and Down's Syndrome, to ensure that they have the best start to life and throughout childhood.

SLTs have a key role as part of the integrated early years workforce, contributing specialist knowledge and skills regarding children's speech, language and communication to enable universal approaches to supporting speech, language and communication development for all children, such as delivering public health messages to expectant families and new parents. They also support early identification of children in need of additional help, by providing training to other professionals such as health visiting teams and early year practitioners.

SLTs support adults with SLCN including those who fall between the gaps for example between learning disability and mental health services as well, assessing and treating communication disorders to facilitate success in education as well as entering and returning to employment (such as a person that has developed aphasia post stroke) as protective factors for health.

Health Improvement

Speech and Language Therapists (SLT) enable people to improve their health by allowing individuals to maintain and maximise their speech, language, communication and swallowing abilities when their health conditions compromise them, for example people with communication difficulties post stroke, people with a learning disability or people who have dementia

SLTs enable individuals to access life opportunities and to make healthy choices by providing supportive communication strategies and aids and supporting people to self-manage conditions and rehabilitation by providing personalised programmes and exercises.

SLTs make every contact count by promoting healthy life choices to people with communication needs by ensuring that clients with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are able to be informed about health services through accessible information and inclusive communication strategies (for example through symbols, or through using strategies to support understanding).

SLTs recognise the importance of their broader role in health promotion and as part of multi-disciplinary teams, particularly where people with SLCN are vulnerable. For example, SLTs ensure effective communication with people with a learning disability who also have other health issues – this might range from developing bespoke pain management plans, explaining swallowing screening for cancer patients or transplants for those with coronary heart disease.

Population Healthcare

Speech and Language Therapists have a broad role in raising awareness of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) across the health and care system. Raising awareness of need and promoting reasonable adjustments, accessible information and inclusive communication environments has benefits across the population. The training they provide as well as campaigns and initiatives developed by RCSLT such as 'Communication Access UK' help people with SLCN access health services, education and employment. In addition, inclusive communication environments help with mental wellbeing, creating a sense of belonging.

Speech and Language Therapists train health and care professionals, service users and carers in signs of dysphagia and strategies to support with safe and enjoyable eating and drinking, across the lifespan. This helps to ensure people are meeting their nutritional requirements, can benefit from the potential psychosocial benefits of participating in mealtimes and avoid dysphagia related poor health outcomes.

Health Protection

Some Speech and Language Therapists have been involved directly with the Covid vaccination programme by providing the vaccination in the local or large COVID-19 vaccination centres.

Speech and Language Therapists provide training around inclusive communication environments, reasonable adjustments and accessible information. Therefore, Speech and Language Therapists have a key role in supporting people with speech, language and communication needs to understand information and make informed choices around screening, immunisation and public health messages.

Speech and Language Therapy - Wider Reading and Case Study Examples

<p>Health Protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help Kids Talk – a community-wide initiative that aims to give every child the best start in life by prioritising speech, language and communication development • Dysphagia Friendly Care Homes: Improving the early identification and management of eating, drinking and swallowing disorders (dysphagia) in 12 North Derbyshire care homes 	<p>Wider Determinants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of Chatting Time Series (including Changing time is Chatting Time and Anytime is Chatting Time) – a suite of resources that support parents to interact with their babies and young children throughout the day • Early Years Communication and Language Pathway in Manchester • Communication first: people experiencing street homelessness • Speech and Language Therapy – AHPs promoting, growing and developing social prescribing
<p>Population Healthcare</p>	<p>Health Improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical outcomes of patients referred to Speech & Language Therapy with Chronic Cough (CC) • Enabling adults with learning disabilities to understand their health recommendations • Speech and Language Therapy – AHP Prescriber – Social Prescribing