

# Sentence trouble



## 50% of Youth Offending Teams have accessed training from The Communication Trust

**Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) across England and Wales are reporting changes in their practice after training from The Communication Trust.**

The two-day programme helps staff learn how to recognise and work with young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), which affect 60% of young people in the youth justice system.



*"The training was brilliant. I was able to put it into practice straightaway!" - Magistrate*

### Training across England and Wales

Funded by the Youth Justice Board, over 1,800 staff have now accessed the training at 74 different locations.

The course helps staff to better identify where the young people they work with may have communication needs.

### Simple changes make a difference

Participants are offered practical tips, resources and strategies to make communication easier. Participants learn how simple changes to practice can make a huge difference.

As one person said "I now sit down with the young person and make timetables as visual as possible".

### The Secure Estate and magistrates

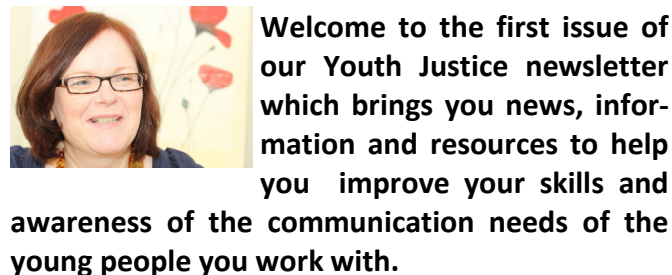
The Trust is currently delivering workshops sessions to staff at Young Offenders Institutions (YOIs), Secure Children's Homes (SCHs) and Secure Training Centres (STCs)

The Trust has also delivered workshops in partnership with the Youth Justice Board (YJB) to magistrates, police and legal professionals.

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**News, information and support from  
The Communication Trust's Youth Justice Programme**

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We have trained over 2000 individuals, developed a website, a screening tool and other supporting resources.

As I step down as Director, and reflect on five years at the Trust, the Youth Justice Programme is one of the things that I am most proud of.

I leave it in the capable hands of Cara Evans, Interim Director and Dave Mahon, Programme Manager and I look forward to following its future development with great interest.

Director, The Communication Trust

**To get in touch or to be added to the mailing list, please email [dmahon@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](mailto:dmahon@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk)**

**As part of the Trust's YOT training package we have been training staff in the use of a screening tool.**

The tool is not diagnostic in nature but helps staff to identify where communication needs may exist in the young people they work with. Any issues can be flagged up and specific strategies employed to support these needs. Where communication needs are more serious it can also be a trigger to refer a young person for a speech and language assessment. Screening tools are well established in some YOTs.

F6 checks			
Score	SLCN 9	RL (Receptive language - understanding) 5	EL (expressive language - talking) 3
Score	<div>8-12 – high</div> <div>4-7 – borderline</div> <div>0-3 – low</div> <div>If score is high consider issues associated with significant language difficulties</div>	<div>4-6 – high</div> <div>3 – borderline</div> <div>0-2 – low</div> <div>If score is borderline or high, consider issues associated with difficulties understanding language</div>	<div>4-6 – high</div> <div>2-3 – borderline</div> <div>1 – low</div> <div>If score is borderline or high, consider issues associated with expressive language difficulties</div>
<p>Add any other considerations from background or probe questions:</p> <p>Lots of difficulty 'getting words out', really mixed up talking. Other lads get fed up with waiting for him to get out what he wants to say. He is more often giving up and storming off.</p> <p>Refused writing task initially but eventually wrote 2 lines. Lots of crossings out and weak spelling. Awkward pen grip. Limited vocabulary</p> <p><u>Summary of Findings</u></p> <p>Consider difficulties highlighted with literacy, communication, memory co-ordination, organisation and possible numeracy. Appears to be experiencing difficulty with understanding and with talking</p>			

For example, Bradford and Bolton YOTs who both developed their own tools. For some YOTs, whether through the Trust's screen or through locally developed screens, this process has become regularised as part of their processes. The Trust is supportive of the benefits that a screening process can bring. At the heart of this is an acceptance that communication needs should be a priority rather than an afterthought.

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# Sentence trouble on film

The Communication Trust has produced a new ***Sentence Trouble*** film for youth offending teams, lawyers, secure estate staff, magistrates and the police.

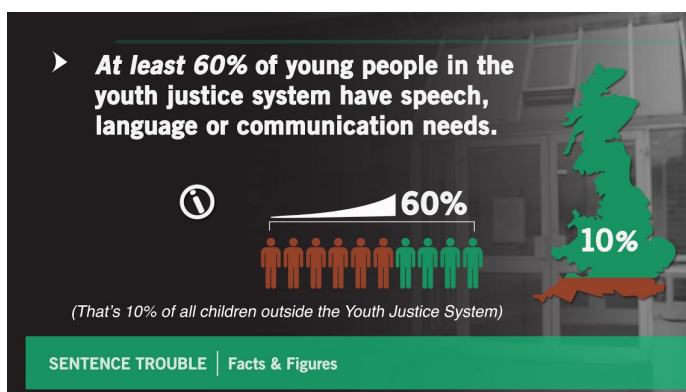
*Sentence Trouble: Better communication in the Youth Justice system* explains what communication needs are and how to recognise a young person with SLCN. It also offers tips and strategies for improving interactions with young people.

The film calls for changes in the law to ensure young defendants with SLCN have the same rights as witnesses to an intermediary, who can support them to communicate with a lawyer or police officer.

In the film, Linda Logan, Haringey Magistrate speaks about the importance of training and better skills. She would like to see mandatory training in this area for all magistrates.

Diz Minnitt, Speech and Language Lead for the Association of YOT Managers and Operations Manager at Milton Keynes YOT, who appears on the film says, *"I was delighted to be involved in this film. It now feels that there is growing understanding of the issues and an impetus for positive and systemic change."*

To see the film visit [www.sentencetrouble.info/film](http://www.sentencetrouble.info/film)



## The Way We Talk

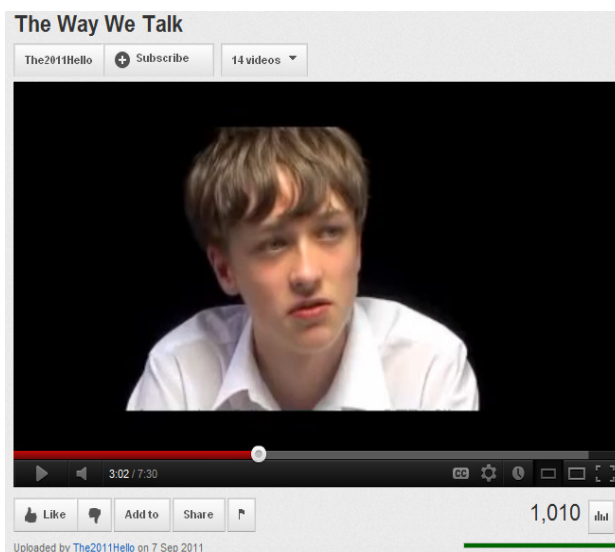
The ***The Way We Talk*** video explains just what it's like for children and young people who have a communication difficulty.

The video was produced as part of *Hello* — The National Year of communication.

Seven children with speech, language and communication needs talk about their lives, their experiences at school and what it's like to have a communication difficulty.

The video shows that while some communication difficulties are obvious, others can be more subtle. Happily, all of these children and young people are supported by a speech and language therapist. However, many children and young people do not receive this kind of support, particularly where their difficulty is more subtle.

Many of the young people you work with may have similar needs, however for many it will not have been recognised or diagnosed.



To view:

[www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk)

## Positive practice: Feedback from YOT training

Since October 2010 The Communication Trust has trained 1,800 Youth Offending Team staff in England and Wales to help them support young people with speech, language and communication needs.

We were keen to draw on the experiences of trained staff and so we spoke to 20 staff at four different YOTs to find out about the strategies they use to support the young people they work with and see how the training had helped to change or improve practice.

Many of the examples can be applied or adapted wherever you work and can help young people you work with to better understand the system they find themselves in, better understand what you are asking of them and enable them to make themselves understood more clearly.

“Looking at words that we use, ‘breach free engagement programme’ – too wrapped up with jargon. I work with prevention – what is reprimand, final warning etc? So many Orders, so many different names”

### Opportunity for new strategies

For some staff the training was a chance to build on what they already do but for others it was an introduction and an opportunity to implement new strategies.

### Dedication

What came out clearly in the interviews was that staff are extremely dedicated in their support for the young people they work with.

### Creative ways to communicate

It was felt that the YOT environment is very paper and information-download intensive. However, many staff are aware of this and are now using creative ways to communicate information to young people.

Many are very conscious of the complexity of language used in the system and said that they now try to explain things in simpler terms and check understanding.

“...he thinks he can’t read or write – he can – he just needs a lot of support and help and I wish I’d found out earlier...I had assumed he was lazy.”

“Reassuring young people that they have enough time to read documents prepared about them. Had expected young people to just sit and read reports before panels without any consideration as to whether they could read them. Now making much more effort to sit and go through reports with young person. Rather than just handing over reports and asking if they are ok (and they might say ok whether they understand them or not), am now reading with them, clarifying info, making changes if young person want to change things. More likely to comply if they have had input into referral order panel report (alternative to court).”

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## Tips and strategies for visual information

The way in which information is presented can make a difference.

For example, a visual timetable can be used with a young person to help them work out what they need to do on a weekly basis.

Similarly, comic strip conversations can be a very useful tool for mapping out events, getting the right order and seeing how situations arose.

Thoughts and feelings can be explored through bubbles and speech bubbles. Different perspectives can be explored by adding in new thought

“Redesigned timetables – e.g. if activity is ‘going to the gym’ – now words and pictures of someone at the gym. Young people receiving timetables with pictures – new system – timetables look better with pictures – presented it to young people as being easier for staff. All young people have now asked for pictures, even those that don’t need pictures”

“I had a young person, only 12, finding it hard to engage, I took a blank A3 sheet, drew a road, drew stages of his offence, drew stop signs at points at which he could offend. He really enjoyed it and benefited [from the session]. He seemed quite shocked, when he realised: ‘I shouldn’t have run away from police, I could have stayed at home’. Realisation without prompting - a simple exercise that he could really engage with.”

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## Thinking about time

Staff reported other ways that help to support the communication needs of the young people they work with.

This can be as simple as shortening sessions where young people find it difficult to concentrate for long periods.

Giving more consideration to the environment was also a change highlighted by staff.

For example, finding areas where there are less likely to be distractions.

“Supervision sessions are shorter now, more role play, recognise if there are problems, stopping and summarising even during role plays, wouldn’t have done that before. Using examples, keeping it simple, demonstrating myself.”

“Comfortable environments so that they can engage in supervision. Can be very distracting in little booths in open plan offices. Now find specific environments and go in and set up rooms to make them more comfortable.”

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## Find out more: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Youth justice practitioners are increasingly aware of the high prevalence of young people with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) which affects 3-7% of the population.

### What is ADHD?

The guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) describe ADHD as a 'behavioural syndrome', characterised by inattention and restlessness; impulsivity; and hyperactivity.

### Information overload

People with ADHD have difficulty suppressing their impulses and therefore respond to more cues than the average person. Rather than failing to pay attention, they pay attention to everything. This means they're often overloaded

with information they cannot filter out. These people are unable to stop and think about a situation, to 'apply the brakes' and consider the consequences before they act.

### Think before you act?

Behavioural inhibition and interference control functions within the brain are crucial to normal behaviour; they allow a delay in responding so that we can think before we act. It is the degradation of these functions which typifies the outcomes of ADHD.

### Boredom threshold

People with ADHD have a very low threshold of boredom. They need stimulus all the time so when working with them we have to either distract them into learning or reduce the distractions so they can learn.

## More support and information

### NHS Choices

On the NHS Choices website you can watch a video in which a psychiatrist explains how ADHD affects children's behavior and how parents manage their child's ADHD.

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

### The National Autistic Society

The National Autistic Society feature a section on their website dedicated to ADHD. It also features hints and tips for supporting children and young people with ADHD.

<http://www.autism.org.uk/about-autism/related-conditions/adhd-attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder.aspx>

## Meet the workforce

Peter Farthing,  
Youth Attendance Centres, London

Peter Farthing, an ex police officer with a background in the RAF, is temporary Regional Manager for five senior and eight junior London Attendance Centres. The Attendance Centre Requirement offers constructive activities for young offenders in a group environment.

### How many young people with SLCN would you estimate come to your centre?

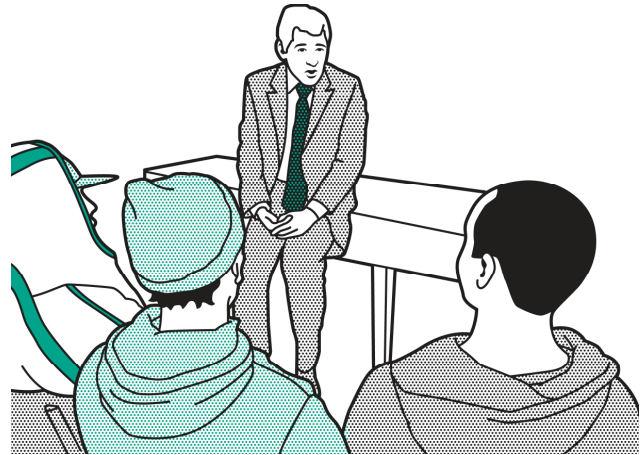
About 80%. Around 30% have communication problems—and for many English is not their first language. Another 50% have other communication needs; they struggle to understand language and have numeracy and literacy difficulties.

### What do you think is the reason for 60% of young people in the justice system having SLCN?

Many have not completed their education. Many don't get support at home that they need to prepare them for life. For example, conversation and word games, that kind of thing. Some come from broken families but that's not necessarily the reason – many are brought up in families with poor parenting skills. Nowadays, there aren't the role models to set an example to youngsters and parents need to be taught how to bring up children correctly.

### What is the impact on your centres?

Young people have to sign a contract at the centre – many can't read it or sign it. Sometimes they just make a mark, and many of them probably haven't really understood it.



### How do you support a young person with SLCN? How can you help them?

I try to avoid reading or writing. So lots of visual stuff, powerpoint, pictures and so on. We try to 'engage and explain'. We usually include a session on communication skills, looking at actions and consequences.

### What tips would you give to the workforce to support young people with communication difficulties?

Talk to young people at their level to engage their trust and build rapport. Investing in development and training of staff is essential.

### How do you think the problems of young people with SLCN can be addressed?

The workforce need to remember that not everyone understands the jargon. Words like 'reparation' and 'caution' – young people just don't know what this means.

### Can you give any tips to young people? How can they help themselves.

Be honest about yourself. Don't be afraid to admit you don't understand. Go back to basics – there is help out there for you. But don't use your difficulties as an excuse for bad behaviour.

**The Communication Trust** is a campaigning voice for children with speech, language and communication needs. We raise awareness, influence policy and promote best practice among the children's workforce and commission work from our Consortium members, a coalition of nearly 50 leading voluntary sector organisations.

We were set up in 2007 by children's charities Afasic and I CAN, with BT and Council for Disabled Children.

## Hello

In 2011 the Trust ran *Hello*, the national year of communication - in conjunction with Jean Gross, the Government's Communication Champion for Children - aiming to make children's communication a priority in homes and schools across the UK.

## What young people say...

The Communication Trust has been talking to young people at London Attendance Centres about their experiences in court. Here are some of the comments we heard from them:

*"It would help if they asked me 'do you understand?'"*

*"When I didn't really understand I just looked at my Mum's face. I knew it was bad 'cause she was crying."*

*"It wasn't easy to answer the questions... They would be talking to me and using these big words and I didn't understand and I would say 'yeah...yeah'"*

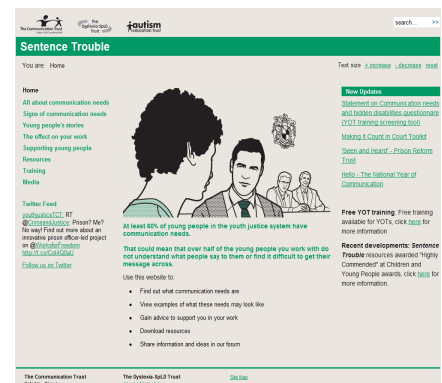
*"Remorse'? I don't know what that means. I haven't got a clue what you are talking about."*

*"It would help if they had - like - a person who could stand with you to help you understand."*

Our experience showed that many young people can struggle to understand in the court environment. For example, we discovered that the level of language can be beyond many young people. This included young people who you would have no hesitation in describing as very articulate.

## Sentence Trouble

The website features resources and links to other organisations. On the website you can find The Sentence Trouble booklet which offers information about speech, language and communication needs and provides practical advice to help you support the young people you work with.



**[www.sentencetrouble.info](http://www.sentencetrouble.info)**

**Join us on twitter [@youthjusticeTCT](https://twitter.com/youthjusticeTCT)**

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