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GIVING EVERY child a voice

Speech and Language UK and Coram PACEY's project to develop targeted training specifically for childminders.

Speech and language development in the early years of a child's life (aged five and under) is a major focus for government in both England and Wales. Increasingly, speech, language and communication skills are recognised as critical to children's wellbeing, learning, and future opportunities. But speech and language challenges are common and can include a wide range of difficulties, like delays in talking, finding it hard to understand or use language, or life-long conditions like Developmental Language Disorder (DLD).

Play, family interaction, and environments that support communication can help children develop their speech, language and communication skills. But the two million children with speech and language challenges need extra support. In some areas of deprivation, as many as 50% of children start school with language difficulties.

Speech and Language UK is the leading organisation in the UK dedicated to supporting children with speech and language challenges. Their recent report, 'Getting in early', shows that it's essential that a child's challenges are identified early. Language at age two has been found to predict reading, maths, and writing when children start school. The earlier children get support, the better.



Speech and Language UK



In England:

- National guidance emphasises a 'system-wide approach' integrating health, education, and social care to meet speech, language and communication needs. This is supported by national programmes like the Government's Best start in speech, language and communication pathway.
- Key government strategies include early identification (such as screening at ages two to two and a half), universal and targeted interventions, creating communication-supportive environments, and supporting parents with resources and training.
- Programmes like Speech and Language UK's Early Talk Boost have demonstrated significant progress in children's language skills, especially for those who need help to catch up with their peers.

In Wales:

- The Welsh Government's Talk With Me plan aims for all professionals working with children under five to be trained in speech, language and communication development and support, echoing a whole-system and preventative approach.
- Legislation including the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Healthy Child Wales Programme prioritises universal, targeted, and specialist support at every level, recognising bilingual contexts and aiming for every child to reach developmental milestones and school readiness.
- There is a focus on early years workforce training, multi-agency working, family engagement, and targeted interventions for late talkers, late language emergence, and children with conditions like Developmental Language Disorder.

In June 2025, working with Speech and Language UK, Coram PACEY undertook a speech, language and communication survey with members. The results confirm the level of need, showing that just over 33% of respondents were supporting children with a formally recognised speech and language challenge and just over 30% of respondents stated

that they were caring for a child who was waiting to be assessed for a speech and language need. Additionally, 41% of respondents felt that they were caring for children who may have a speech and language need that had not been formally recognised or referred for assessment.

Coram PACEY is working with Speech and Language UK to adapt their Early Talk materials into a comprehensive training programme specifically for childminders. The current Early Talk training gives early years practitioners the knowledge and skills to support the development of speech, language and communication skills in children aged five and under. The programme includes sessions that focus on typical language development, creating communication-supportive environments, and identification and support for children with speech and language challenges. A small number of Coram PACEY members are involved in a focus group and their insights, alongside wider work later in the year, will ensure the training is tailored to better suit the unique role of childminders. Keep an eye on our website for updates in the coming months. 

Resources

- Speech and Language UK – The issue: bit.ly/41dK8PT
- Best start in speech, language and communication (England): bit.ly/4fHguZr
- Communication and Language (England): bit.ly/4fKq8dK
- Talk with me (Wales): bit.ly/45ETohi

