

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION DISORDER



Cambian Information Sheet

Contact Cambian referrals team here:  0161 507 3723  ccs.referrals@cambianguroup.com

Social Communication Disorder (SCD), also known as Semantic Pragmatic Disorder (SPD), is a life-long condition that makes communicating with other people difficult. It presents in areas of vocalisation and processing language rather than a speech impediment or through a struggle with the mechanics of language (i.e. grammar).

Semantics refers to the meaning behind words, mainly logical and lexical semantics. Logical semantics is the branch of linguistics that is concerned with sense, reference and implication, whilst lexical semantics is the analysis of a words meaning and relationships between those words. In essence, semantics are the signs and signals of our vocal communication.

Pragmatism is the meaning behind sensibly and realistically dealing with things and in this context, understanding and processing words practically.

Combining the two – you get SCD, a condition that causes issues with communicating in a socially appropriate way. Those with the condition may not follow the unwritten rules of language, often not understanding sarcasm or non-literal language.

In some ways, SCD is similar to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) when it comes to communication difficulty. All those with Autism will have difficulties with the semantics of language, however, those with SCD may not present the same ritualistic behaviours associated with Autism.

Some differences in treatment for SCD and ASD include:

Social communication difficulties are a significant factor in diagnosing ASD, however SCD can be present in those who would otherwise not meet the criteria of an ASD diagnosis. As the two conditions do share similarities, it's important to rule out ASD first, as this will affect the overall treatment for the individual.

SCD treatment can focus more heavily on developing communication skills. Social interaction requires some level of encouragement, both in and outside educational settings. Family members can develop their skills, and communicate with different professionals on the best way to help engage the child, on an case-by-case basis.

Specialised schooling can be a great help in this regard.

What causes Social Communication Disorder?

It is not known whether SCD has a cause but is widely speculated to originate from birth. It is often considered to have hereditary connections; that being, it is passed on through genetics. There is on-going research into many different potential causes of SCD as a whole, surrounding brain disorders, dietary allergies and more.

How does it affect day-to-day life?

Those with SCD can behave differently in different environments including at home and school. With this in mind, it's always a good idea to have parents and teachers keeping an eye on behaviour and as such, their concerns should be taken seriously. This will usually come in the form of behavioural observation. As SCD is a communication disorder, these behavioural differences may not be noticed until an age when the child can communicate more frequently. SCD is often diagnosed when other conditions, like ASD and deafness, have been ruled out. This means there is no specific behaviours to look out for, however, deficits in social interaction, social cognition and other language difficulties may be signs that can help get a diagnosis.

As a whole, humans are constantly absorbing information, processing it and then discarding what isn't relevant and storing that which is; through our memory. From a language standpoint, we build a bank of words and meanings to help us navigate the complexities of conversation. This is where someone with SCD may have to use techniques to aid them in their understanding.

As an example – imagine not fully understanding our timing words or tenses – and think about how difficult it might be to understand someone's intent:

A

I was at the shop

B

I am at the shop

C

I will be at the shop

When we speak to someone, we use our past experiences to interpret their intentions and their wants and we anticipate what might happen next. People who have difficulties with this form of processing will have problems with determining appropriate responses. They may appear rude or outspoken and be unaware when the other person wants to end the conversation.

Those with SCD may also struggle with less specific wording:

“Pass me that blue pen.”

“What have you been up to today?”

We may see these as fairly easy to understand and respond to, but one of these sentences is a specific instruction, whilst one is largely vague.

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Children in their early years may present some of the following signifiers:

When talking, they may:

- Sound very grown-up.
- Speak fluently, but on their terms.
- Have difficulty giving specific information on one event.
- Give no appropriate eye contact/facial expression exchange.



In learning, they may:

- Have problems with abstract concepts ("next week"; "guess what").
- Be late or very early readers, but show little understanding.
- Have some motor skills problems (writing, drawing, bike riding, dressing, football).
- Be easily distracted in a busy environment.
- Struggle with team events and games.



Behaviourally, they can:

- Appear rude or arrogant.
- Embarrass others.
- Be over-active or too passive.
- Insist on following rules and expect others to do so too.
- Be isolated – those with SCD won't ask other children to play with them, or be over-friendly.



Other possible features may include:

- Dislike of crowds.
- Food fads.
- Problems with social events (school breaks, parties).
- Over-sensitive to some noises or tastes.

In school, children with Social Communication Disorder may need:

- A quiet, orderly working environment with visual clues.
- Predictability to reduce anxieties – turn-taking, changes in routine clearly signalled.
- Clear rules on how to behave using concrete language they can understand.
- Simple, specific instructions spoken slowly – ‘put the toys in the box’ not ‘tidy up’.
- As much as possible written down – clear timetable, instructions, messages.
- Small work groups, good role models and special small communication group activities.
- Constant encouraging reminders supported by visual/ written information.
- A home/school diary – on a daily basis if possible – with regular information on topic work to facilitate pre-tutoring and shared information.

Futher Resources and Contacts:

AFASIC

AFASIC is working to support children and their parents, enabling them to overcome their speech and language difficulties. Offer advice, support, information, publications, courses and conferences, activity days for young people and have local support groups and online parent forums.

Website: www.afasicengland.org.uk UK Helpline: **0300 666 9410**

I CAN

Children with communication difficulties might find it hard to express themselves, understand words, speak in sentences and understand simple instructions. I CAN are the experts in helping children with communication difficulties. If they find and help these children and their families, we can unlock their potential. I CAN run ‘early years’ centres and two specialist schools for children aged 4-19, both with assessment centres.

Website: www.ican.org.uk Tel: **020 7843 2544** Email: enquiries@ican.org.uk

Contact a Family

UK wide advice on all aspects of caring for a child with any special need, disability or rare disorder; national SEN help line; downloadable fact sheets and publications; Connected magazine; local support groups and parent reps; campaigns and research etc.

Website: www.cafamily.org.uk Tel: **0808 808 3555** Email: info@cafamily.org.uk

The Association of Speech & Language Therapists in Independent Practice

Information on speech and language difficulties and common causes, benefits and costs, find your nearest independent speech and language therapist (SALT) via their website.

Website: <https://www.asltip.com> Tel: **0203 002 3704**