NHS

The Intensive Positive Behaviour Support (IPBS) Team

Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear
NHS Foundation Trust

Supporting Children and Young People with Learning Disabilities and Behaviours that Challenge:
The Role of Speech and Language Therapy

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Background

It is estimated that up to 80% of people with Learning Disabilities also have communication difficulties, such as a reduced ability to understand information and/or express needs, ideas or emotions [1].

Receptive and expressive communication difficulties and environmental factors such as little interaction and engagement with staff may increase the risk of behaviours that challenge [2].
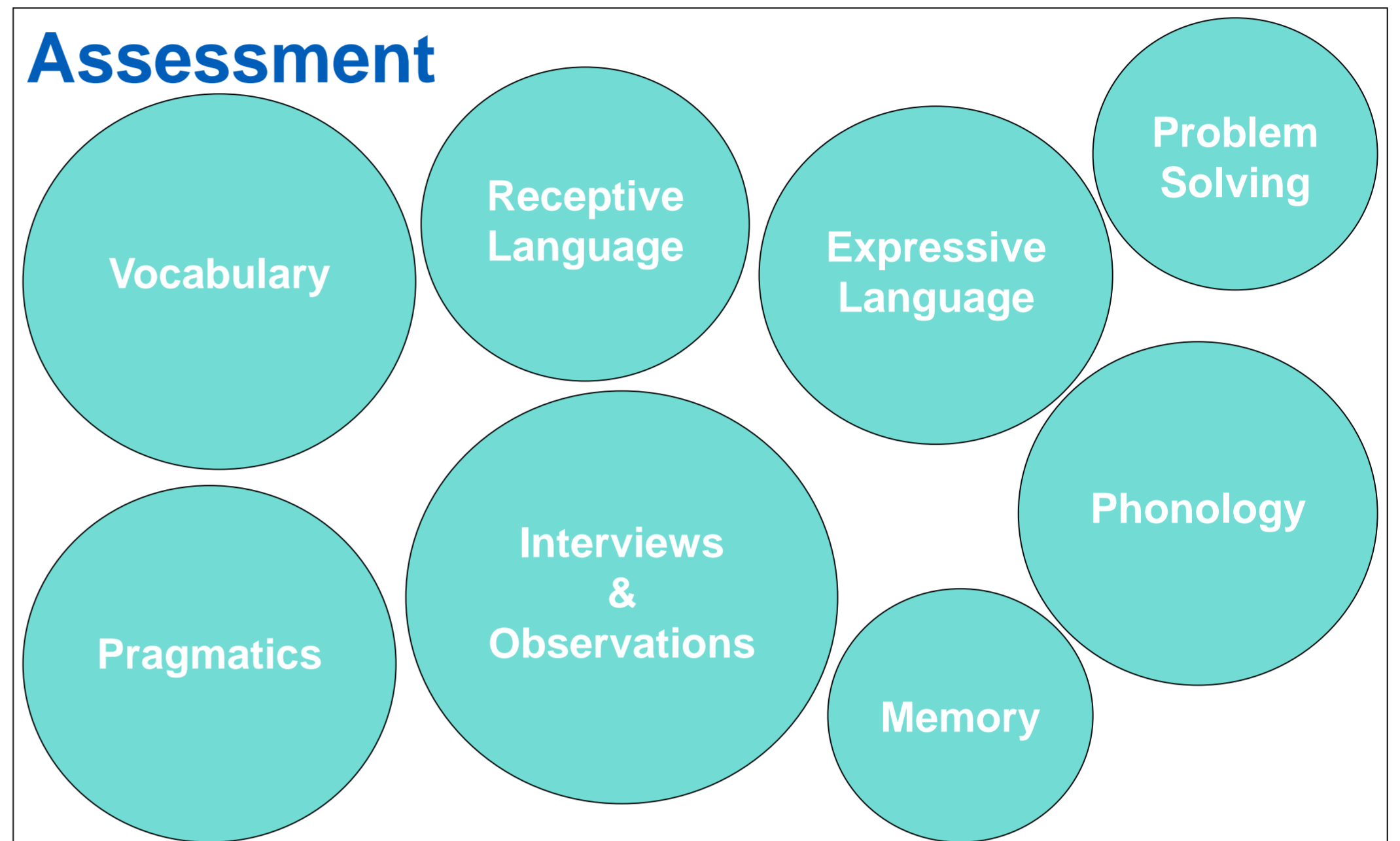
A lack of effective communication may lead to frustration, social withdrawal, anger and aggression expressed towards themselves or others [3].

Staff working with people who have Learning Disabilities must receive mandatory training in Positive Behaviour Support and different types of communication methods; including non-verbal communication [4].

Behaviours that challenge may be reduced by using proactive strategies such as developing an individual's communication skills [5].

Approximately 60% of people with Learning Disabilities have the ability to use symbolic communication methods such as pictures, signs or symbols. Many non-verbal individuals demonstrate a desire to communicate; expecting a response from a carer [6].

Assessment

- Vocabulary
- Receptive Language
- Expressive Language
- Problem Solving
- Pragmatics
- Interviews & Observations
- Phonology
- Memory

Four Functions of Behaviour

To gain access to a tangible
→
- **Makaton** enables a person to request items; removing frustration [7].
- **PECS** allows an individual to exchange an image for a desired object [8].
- **Wait Cards** act as a promissory note for an item/activity requested [9].

To gain attention
→
- **Intensive Interaction** can attract the attention of a conversation partner [10].
- **Pain Boards** can be used to help a child express discomfort [11].
- **Communication Passports** help carers recognise a person's behaviour [12].

To escape or avoid an activity/situation
→
- **Break Cards** can be used to escape tasks the child finds frustrating [13].
- **Social Stories** aid preparation; increasing structure & reducing anxiety [14].
- **Visual Timelines** help children to identify the final goal of a task [15].

To seek sensory stimulation
→
- **Talking Mats** can help carers identify sensory activities a child enjoys [16].
- **Objects of Reference** (multisensory) can be used to communicate [17].
- **Intensive Interaction** may reduce self-injury & stereotypical behaviours [18].

Functional Communication

Improving Quality of Life for Children and Young People

- Functional communication methods and systems enable an individual to make choices which subsequently improve their overall quality of life [19].

- The IPBS team use evidence based therapies such as Speech and Language Therapy to describe, predict and change behaviours that challenge.

- Behaviours that challenge can be reduced when communication training is prioritised and implemented by Multi-Disciplinary Teams [20].

- Meaningful and valued community participation increases when carers understand a young person's needs and preferences.

- Having access to favoured purposeful activities, supports young people to develop positive relationships; enhancing physical and mental wellbeing [21].

The Risk of Not Supporting Speech, Language and Communication Needs

- Unidentified Speech, Language and Communication Needs place children and young people at risk of developing a range of negative behavioural outcomes.

- Difficulties forming friendships, may lead to an increased risk of peer rejection; leading to further behaviours that challenge [22].

- A lack of communication support may contribute to reduced levels of engagement, restricted activities, poor education and employment.

- A loss of identity could result in a state of learned helplessness, isolation, depression, a risk of harm to self and others, and failure to reach potential.

- Failure to support communication difficulties will have a extremely detrimental effect on health and well-being; at a high cost to health and social care [23].

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