

The Social Communication Intervention Programme: Trial of a new speech and language therapy programme for children with social communication disorder: Lay Summary

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What was already known?

Children who have social communication difficulties are at risk of academic and social disadvantage which may continue into adulthood, resulting in reduced independence, social isolation and unemployment. Social communication disorder (SCD) (sometimes called pragmatic language impairment (PLI)) is a condition in which children show social impairments like those found in children with autism spectrum disorders, and language difficulties like those found in children with developmental language disorder (DLD). Speech and language therapists (SLTs) are key in providing intervention to address both the language and social difficulties experienced by these children. There is currently no intervention that addresses needs in both social and language skills. There are no randomized controlled trials of speech-language intervention for children.

What was planned?

A randomized controlled trial of a new speech and language therapy intervention, the Social Communication Intervention Programme (SCIP) was used to test its effectiveness. Children aged 6 -11 years old with SCD were randomly allocated to receive either SCIP therapy or continue with their local SLT treatment as usual (TAU) for up to 20 weeks. All intervention was delivered in the child's mainstream school with support from family members and teaching assistants.

Who took part?

Eighty-eight children with SCD were recruited from UK SLT services: 59 received SCIP therapy; 29 received TAU. SCIP therapy was entirely taken from the SCIP Manual and delivered to individual children by a member of the research team.

What was discovered?

Twenty hours of SCIP therapy was found to be effective in improving children's conversation skills, functional social communication skills and classroom learning skills and these effects were maintained at 6-month follow-up. Structural language skills did not improve on formal assessment. Parent and teacher reports of the children's outcomes after SCIP or TAU were important in gaining a measurement of changes in pragmatic and social communication skills which are meaningful to the families and were not detected by standardized language tests.

What next?

SCIP was delivered by a team of specially trained and supervised research SLT assistants. In future work it will be important to include estimates of cost-effectiveness and the resources required to support SLTs to deliver SCIP as part of their routine practice. Parents and teachers reported changes that were not evident on formal assessment, therefore development of sensitive, valid and objective outcome measures is needed. It would be important to identify any factors within the child which may indicate potential for change in order to provide intervention at the right time for each child and as efficiently as possible.

You can read the peer reviewed papers related to this study here:

[Randomized controlled trial of SCIP](#)

[Implementation of a manualised intervention](#)

[Parent and Teacher perceptions of SCIP](#)