

## Small Talk: Identifying communication problems in maltreated children



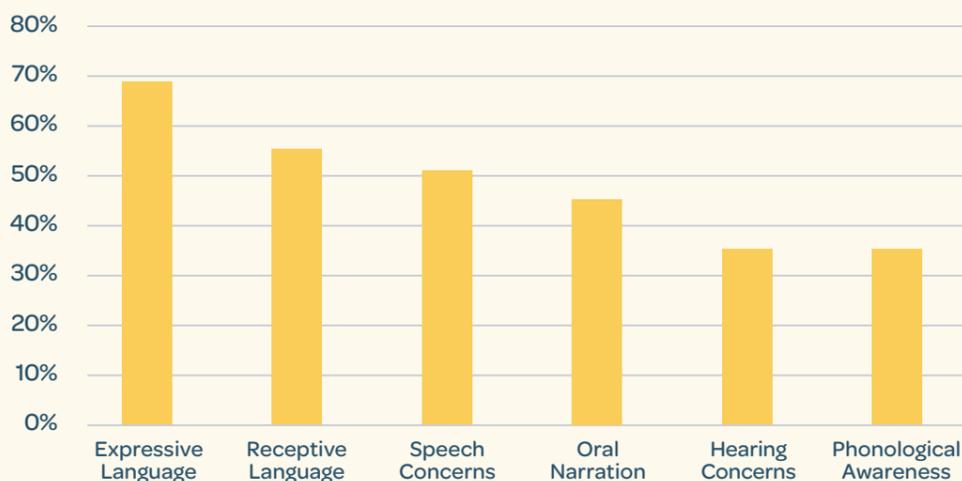
### What is Communication?

Communication is how we share our thoughts, feelings, and ideas through our words, actions and writing. Children who experience abuse and neglect are at risk of having issues with communication. This can lead to problems at school and with friends, families and carers.

### Study Goals

This study measured hearing and speech development in 65 children between the ages of 4-8 years who had experienced substantiated abuse and/or neglect. It also aimed to understand if individuals who worked with these children could identify hearing and speech problems.

### Top six communication problems found in maltreated children study population



*Expressive language: producing words and sentences; Receptive language: understanding words and sentences; Speech concerns: producing speech sounds; Oral Narration: retelling a story; Hearing Concerns: difficulties hearing words and sounds; Phonological awareness: recognising and manipulating sounds in words i.e. rhyming; identifying syllables.*

### Findings

- **88%** of children in the study experienced speech and language problems that a speech pathologist assessed as requiring specific speech and language intervention
- 1 in 4 children had undiagnosed hearing difficulties.
- Children living with their parents (**73%**) were more likely to have language difficulties than children in out of home care (**38%**).
- No significance differences were found based on gender or cultural background in this study. Aboriginal children were no more likely to have speech and language difficulties than non-Aboriginal children.
- Case managers and clinicians found it difficult to determine if children required a speech and language assessment.

Frederico, M., Jackson, A.L., Black, C.M., Joffe, B., McConachy, J. & Worthington, N. (2013). Small Talk: Identifying communication problems in maltreated children – developing a problem identification tool – Final Report, Melbourne: Berry Street.

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### What should I do?

#### Carers

Children need opportunities to hear and use language to develop good language skills. Sometimes children's behavioural difficulties may indicate communication struggles. If you notice any speech and language difficulties please discuss these with your workers.

#### Clinicians

Include assessment of speech and language issues in your work with children.

#### Teachers

Be alert to speech and language functioning which may be a factor in emotional and/or behavioural difficulties and ensure appropriate assessments are undertaken.

#### Policy Makers

Ensure children traumatised by abuse receive holistic assessments, including of their speech and language skills. People working directly with the same children need to be adequately trained to identify developmental risk markers.