



Press Release – For Immediate Release

COMPUTERS AND TV WRONGLY BLAMED FOR CHILDREN'S SPEECH DISORDERS

Hello, 2011 national year of communication, officially launched

One in six parents in Britain believe that the most common cause of speech, language and communication difficulties among children is the time they spend on computers and watching television, according to a new poll published today to mark the launch of the *Hello* campaign (www.hello.org.uk) – the national year of communication.

Over half of parents surveyed blamed speech, language and communication difficulties on parents not talking to their children enough. Nearly one in three parents said they were or had been concerned about their children's communication skills. The OnePoll survey of 6,000 people, including 3,000 parents, was commissioned by the *Hello* campaign to explore perceptions about children's speech and language development.

The *Hello* campaign aims to make children and young people's communication development a priority in homes, nurseries and schools across the country. It is run by The Communication Trust, a coalition of 40 organisations with expertise in speech, language and communication, in partnership with Communication Champion, Jean Gross. The campaign is backed by government and sponsored by BT and Pearson Assessment.

Speech, language and communication needs affect over 1 million children in the UK today: four out of five respondents underestimated the extent of these difficulties. Only one in five of the 6,000 people polled considered biological or genetic reasons to be a possible cause of speech, language and communication needs. However, the *Hello* campaign says the exact cause of long term speech, language and communication needs is often unknown but can be attributed to biological as opposed to environmental factors.

Jean Gross, England's Communication Champion, said: "Public understanding of children's communication difficulties remains worryingly low. The automatic response seems to be to blame parents or technology. This just isn't right. We need to clear up the confusion and myths that exist around this subject. 10% of children – that's two to three in every UK classroom – have some form of long term communication difficulty that can affect them early, severely and for life. Their brains don't process language in quite the same way that other children's brains do. These results reinforce the need for the *Hello* campaign to radically improve understanding of speech, language and communication difficulties and the impact this has on children's lives."

The adults surveyed (48% of whom were parents of children under 5), exposed widespread lack of knowledge about children’s speech and language development. Some of these can be seen in the table below. The poll found, for example, that parents and the general population know more about walking milestones than talking milestones.

Truth	Parents’ response	General population’s response
On average babies say their first words between 12-18 months.	Only 25% knew this	Only 24% knew this
On average children talk in sentences of 3-5 words at around 3 years.	Only 20% got this right	Only 22% got this right
Over 1 million children and young people have some form of long term communication difficulty in the UK.	Only 20% knew this	Only 20% knew this
The majority of 7 year olds who can’t talk properly won’t catch up.	36% think they will catch up	36% think they will catch up
Talking and understanding are the skills used most often in learning in primary and secondary schooling.	Reading skills were rated as the most important for children to develop at primary school and maths at secondary school.	

8% of parents said they had been or were concerned that their children’s communication difficulties were significant, with a greater proportion of these in Northern Ireland (13%) and England (8.1%) than in Scotland (6.1%) and Wales (6%). One in seven of the general population say they wouldn’t have a clue when asked whether they would recognise a child with a speech, language and communication need.

Most adults however could relate to the impact of communication difficulties. When asked how they themselves felt when they struggled to get a message across or got words muddled up, two thirds of adults felt frustrated or silly with only 9% saying it didn’t affect them.

Chris Pike, young person aged 17 with a communication difficulty, says; “The worst part of having a communication difficulty is being misunderstood; quite often the people around me don’t even realise I have these special needs. Parents and teachers clearly want to help me and others like me to develop and reach our full potential. However, the vast majority of people just don’t know the reality of struggling with a communication difficulty.

“It’s upsetting that many people might blame my problems on spending too much time in front of TV and computer screens. Communication difficulties come in a whole variety of different forms; sometimes they aren’t visible. I know the *Hello* campaign will change the way parents, teachers and young people view and understand communication problems. I really hope this will allow children and young people like myself to be recognised and understood, in the same way those with dyslexia and autism are.”

The *Hello* campaign will improve understanding and disseminate information on typical communication development, how to spot if children are struggling and where to go for help and support. 70% of survey respondents felt that more information on how children develop speech, language and communication would be helpful, amongst parents this rose to 82%. Only 22% would ask parents, grandparents or friends for information on general communication development compared to 39% going to the internet.

The *Hello* campaign will also prompt tangible improvements for the 1.2 million children and young people in the UK, with some form of long-term speech, language and communication needs. This means more support for parents and carers, earlier identification of difficulties and earlier, more appropriate, referral to specialist support, such as speech and language therapy.

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To interview Jean Gross, Communication Champion or Wendy Lee, Professional Director for The Communication Trust (with over 25 years expertise in speech and language therapy) contact Laura Smith, Media and Campaigns Manager on lsmith@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk or call 020 7843 2519 / 07766651366. We are also able to provide case studies of parents and young people affected by speech, language and communication needs and regional breakdowns.

About the One Poll survey

- 6,000 respondents took part in the *Hello* launch survey to understand people's perceptions of general communication development and those affected by long term communication difficulties.
- The survey was conducted by OnePoll online between the 19th and 20th January 2011.
- OnePoll are a well respected organisation who undertake a wide range of market research projects on behalf of companies from various sectors within the UK and around the world www.onepoll.com.

About communication difficulties: how to spot the signs

- A child or young person with a speech, language and / or communication difficulty may have speech that is difficult to understand; they can say words and sentences, but they are very unclear so they can't get their messages across.
- They might struggle to say words or sentences or understand words and sentences if explained through talking – however they might be able to build a complex model with picture instructions but be unable to follow simple classroom instructions.
- They may have difficulties knowing how to talk and listen to others during a conversation, they may be seen as rude or cheeky but in fact they do not understand the rules of social interaction. Children and young people may simply have a limited vocabulary or a combination of all these difficulties.
- For information on all aspects of children's communication development, including a new Progress Checker for any concerned parents or professionals, log onto www.talkingpoint.org.uk.

About Hello

- Hello is the national year of communication – a campaign to increase understanding of how important it is for children and young people to develop good communication skills.
- The campaign is run by The Communication Trust, a coalition of 40 leading voluntary sector organisations; in partnership with Jean Gross, the Government's Communication Champion. Together we aim to make 2011 the year when children's communication skills become a priority in schools and homes across the country.
- The campaign is supported by BT and Pearson Assessment and is backed by the Department for Education and Department for Health.
- Please visit www.hello.org.uk for further information or to sign up for regular updates. .
- The national year was originally proposed by John Bercow MP – now Speaker of the House of The National Year was originally proposed by John Bercow MP – now Speaker of the House of Commons - in his July 2008 Review of Services for Children and Young People (0-19) with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN).

About The Communication Trust

- The Communication Trust raises awareness of speech, language and communication issues amongst everyone that works with children and young people. It was founded by Afasic, BT, CDC (Council for Disabled Children) and children's communication charity I CAN.
- The Communication Trust manages a coalition of 40 voluntary organisations and an advisory group that includes the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, Association of Educational Psychologists and the General Teaching Council.

- The Trust's work is supported by the Department for Education and other funders. More information can be found at www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk.

About Jean Gross, England's Communication Champion for children

- Jean Gross is England's Communication Champion for children, appointed by government in response to the 2008 Bercow Review of support for children with speech, language and communication needs.
- The Communication Champion is responsible for working across government, delivery partners and other stakeholders to co-ordinate and build on initiatives to improve services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs.
- The *Hello* campaign is being run by The Communication Trust to in partnership the Communication Champion.
- For more information go to www.thecommunicationcouncil.org.