



Press Release
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‘KEVIN THE TEENAGER’ MALE STEREOTYPE ‘SO UNFAIR’

New research shows boys are more confident communicators than girls

Boys are more confident communicators than girls, particularly when speaking in front of their classmates and teachers, according to the first large-scale UK survey of young people’s views on communication skills.

The new research from independent charity the National Literacy Trust and The Communication Trust, commissioned as part of the *Hello* campaign (the national year of communication) surveyed 6,865 young people aged between 8 and 16.

69% of boys compared to 57% of girls said they were either ‘very confident’ or ‘confident’ when speaking in front of classmates. The research found that more boys than girls value and realise the importance of communication skills, believing that if you speak well it makes you seem more intelligent and that people judge you on the words and phrases that you use. Boys were also more confident in talking with teachers (81% compared with 78%).

The research also discovered that:

- Boys are more likely than girls to strongly agree that communication skills are taken for granted (32% vs 23%).
- Boys see a danger that they will not be taken seriously if they don’t express their views clearly (66% of boys think this compared with 58% of girls).
- More boys are more likely to feel very confident explaining their point of view than girls (35% vs 29%).
- 47% of boys strongly agree that good communication skills give them confidence in social situations compared to only 39% of girls.
- Girls place less importance on being well-spoken - they are more likely than boys to disagree that those with ‘posh accents’ are better speakers (46% vs 39%).
- When asked about factors affecting good communication, girls are more likely to think it is important to see the other person’s face (69% girls vs 64% boys) while boys are more likely to think it is important to hear other people’s voices (84% boys vs 79% girls)
- Overall most young people believe the family play a crucial role in developing children’s communication skills. However, more boys than girls believe that children should just ‘pick up’ communication skills (19% vs 15%).

Director of charity the National Literacy Trust, which works to improve reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, Jonathan Douglas, says: "In the national year of communication, it's heartening to see a new 'voice conscious' generation of boys emerging. While many people believe teenage boys are not the most articulate members of society, like Harry Enfield's 'Kevin the teenager' character, our research shows this is an outdated view. The survey paints a completely different picture of young males as confident communicators who are incredibly aware of the important role communication skills play in a successful school, work and social life.

"Sadly, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to gain the communication skills they need for success. This is why we are taking business volunteers into schools to work with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to help them develop the vital skills they need for working environments."

Professional Director for The Communication Trust, Wendy Lee, says: "Employers often bemoan the lack of young people's communication skills. They want young people to enter the workplace with strong communication skills. This survey highlights how vital communication skills are to young people for success at school and work. It busts the myth that boys don't value communication – they deserve more credit for being 'communication conscious'.

"However, it is concerning that more boys than girls believe communication skills are something children should just be able to 'pick up'. It is important to recognise that these skills do not develop by chance; adults play a fundamental role in supporting language and communication development. This 'self taught' attitude that boys have to communication is really important to highlight. Despite this survey finding boys in general are confident about communication, evidence shows that the proportion of boys to girls with speech, language and communication difficulties is around 4:1.

"These young people can become skilled at masking their difficulties to avoid being singled out or needing help. Struggling to communicate can be hugely frustrating and can lead to poor behaviour and low self confidence, again masking underlying difficulties. It is vital all young people, but particularly those vulnerable young people with communication difficulties, are supported to ensure they have the skills they need to do well in life.

The *Hello* campaign (the national year of communication) is run by The Communication Trust in partnership with Jean Gross, the Government's Communication Champion. *Hello* exists to make children and young people's communication development a priority during 2011 and beyond.

The Communication Trust is made up of 40 leading voluntary organisations with expertise in speech, language and communication. Independent charity the National Literacy Trust is a member of The Communication Trust and is working closely with *Hello* to ensure that every young person in the UK develops the speaking and literacy skills they need for a bright, happy and successful future.

The National Literacy Trust takes business volunteers into secondary schools where they help students develop communication skills for the workplace by taking part in a series of creative workshops. The approach is yielding impressive results with the young people taking part gaining both skills and confidence.

Milad, a pupil at Rosedale College in Hayes says: "I definitely think (the project) is a positive thing, it really helps you to gain confidence. I used to think communication was just something that happens – being taught it improves your confidence level as a person. Going for a job interview now I would know how to talk. I'd be who I am but talk to some people differently."

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For more information about this release and *Hello*, the national year of communication, please contact Laura Smith at the Communication Trust via lsmith@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk or 020 7843 2519 / 07766651366.

For more information about this release and the National Literacy Trust please contact Anna Lindsay, Public Relations Officer via anna.lindsay@literacytrust.org.uk or 020 7820 6256.

About the *Hello* campaign

- *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 (including The National Literacy Trust); 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 Commons - in his July 2008 Review of Services for Children and Young People (0-19) with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN).

About the National Literacy Trust

- The National Literacy Trust is an independent charity that transforms lives through literacy. We believe that society will only be fair when everyone has the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills they need to communicate, to fulfil their potential and to contribute more to society. We campaign to improve public understanding of the vital importance of literacy and communication, as well as delivering projects and working in partnership to reach those most in need of support.
- To help us transform lives through literacy, you can make a donation or support our work. To find out how visit <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/support>
- National Literacy Trust is a registered charity no. 1116260, and a company limited by guarantee, no. 5836486. Registered in England and Wales. Registered address: 68 South Lambeth Road, London SW8 1RL. Tel: 020 7587 1842.

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 I CAN.
- The Communication Trust ensures that access to training and resources support speech, language and communication development for all children and those with SLCN. The Communication Trust develops and manages a coalition of 40 voluntary organisations in order to deliver these objectives.
- It has 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 has been supported by the Department for Education and other funders. More information can be found at www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk