Frequently asked questions

COMMUNICATION LEADERS
The Communication Trust

1. What is Communication Leaders?

Communication Leaders is a peer-mentoring approach developed by The Communication Trust that aims to support the language and communication development of primary and secondary pupils. This approach gives children and young people a unique leadership role in communication in their school and homes.

All the resources and information that you need to implement the approach are available for free on The Communication Trust website **www.thecommunicationtrust/communicationleaders**

Communication Leaders started as a 2 year pilot project, funded by The Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Evaluation of the pilot highlighted benefits for both the Leaders themselves, as well as the pupils that they worked with:

- Over 70% of primary and secondary Leaders felt that their communication skills had improved as a result of being a Communication Leader in their school

- Over 60% of year 7 students felt that their communication skills and confidence had grown and in primary schools, teachers reported improvements in younger children's listening and language skills.

- When describing one of the Communication Leaders involved in the pilot, their mentor said:

"He was very nervous. Low self esteem. Since the project he has become more confident - lovely to see!"

2. How do we choose our Communication Leaders?

It's completely up to you! Some schools involved in the pilot project chose their prefects or head of years; whereas other schools selected pupils who they felt would benefit from some additional responsibility within their school.

We found that all different types of students benefited from the approach and received lots of positive feedback from the Communication Leaders themselves and school mentors about how much the Leaders developed – not only in regards to their language and communication development but also improvements in their social skills and confidence.

3. How many Communication Leaders should we have?

This depends on what's best for your school and pupils – you can have as few or as many Leaders as you would like! We would advise implementing the approach with a small group (5 or 6) of pupils to begin with. This can then be adapted as you can work out how you would like to implement the approach.

4. Do the Communication Leaders need a staff based mentor?

Yes, it's really important that the Leaders have a member of staff to help them to understand their role and plan and implement the approach in school. There are training sessions included in the resources on the *Communication Leaders* page; these are designed to be used by staff mentors as an initial introduction to the Communication Leaders about how communication is an essential skill and the importance of their role.

5. How much time does it take to be a Communication Leader?

Your pupils can spend as much or as little time as they like being a Communication Leader, however we suggest that Leaders take on the role for at least a whole school year, to really allow them to get the most out of it. If your Leaders are going to work with other pupils in the school, we would recommend at least a fortnightly session so that they can all get to know each other and benefit from the opportunity. If you're looking to put together a school campaign about communication, this might take less time; perhaps just a few initial campaign meetings and then another meeting at the end of the term to reflect on the success of the campaign.

Whichever way you choose to implement *Communication Leaders* in your school, it's important to put aside at least two sessions initially, one training session and then one planning session to discuss how the Leaders would like to use their role.

6. Do we have to use the Communication Leaders resources?

Not at all! It's completely up to you what resources you or the Communication Leaders would like to use. You may find that the Like2Talk and Word Up packs are a helpful guide for when you introduce the approach to the Communication Leaders as it gives them ideas for the different types of communication activities they can do, but they can always create and find new and exciting activities themselves. For instance one school developed a *'Communication Challenge Checklist'* to support the communication skills of their mentees within the classroom environment, while another group of Leaders adapted the approach to support the literacy skills of some of the year 7 students in their school; using individual reading sessions to also develop vocabulary and comprehension of their year 7 mentees.

7. How have other schools implemented Communication Leaders successfully?

A number of schools involved in the pilot project implemented the approach in different ways in order to best suit the school and pupils. For example, at one secondary school in London, the main focus of their peer mentor support was to help vulnerable year 7 students to improve their communication skills and confidence through a weekly after school 'communication club', where they enjoyed communication and language activities, some from the resource packs and others that they developed themselves.

Whereas the Communication Leaders in a primary school in Clacton decided to use their weekly sessions to work with reception children in their classroom, supporting their free play. The teachers reported how they saw improvements in both the Leaders and the foundation stage children they were working with.

Communication Leaders is a success when it is adapted to meet the needs of your pupils and your school and where the ethos of the approach runs throughout; that the Leaders are fully engaged and involved every step of the way in shaping how they want the *Communication Leaders* approach to be implemented in their school.

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Every child understood