

## Talk 1: "What causes language disorders in children?"

When a child has difficulty learning to talk, people often assume that the parents are to blame. Most children learn easily, and so it is natural to think that the child must just not have the right language input. Studies of children with specific language impairment (SLI), however, challenge this assumption. In general, language problems are not caused by a poor language environment, or by minimal brain damage around the time of birth. There is good evidence for a genetic contribution to the risk for SLI, but this is complex. It is unusual for a single genetic mutation to be involved; rather, it seems that many small effects of genes add together and combine with environmental factors to create risk for SLI. It is important to recognise that discovery of a genetic basis for language impairment does not mean that it cannot be treated.

### Key references

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[Video link for young man from KE family: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fg2rL0koL9Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fg2rL0koL9Q)

## **Talk 2: Learning difficulties in oral and written language in children with SLI**

For many years, children with language impairments were treated separately from children with reading difficulties (dyslexia): speech and language therapists focussed on SLI, whereas teachers and psychologists dealt with dyslexia. However, the more we discover, the clearer it becomes that this distinction is unhelpful. Most children with dyslexia have problems with the phonological aspects of language, and the dividing line between dyslexia and SLI is not clearcut. I will consider how insights from the study of language impairments can help with assessment and intervention for children with reading difficulties, and vice versa.

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