

Deaf children can experience difficulties with integrating into mainstream, hearing environments. This can lead to social isolation, depression and other mental health difficulties.

smiLE Therapy is a video-based social communication intervention that aims to teach deaf children skills to confidently communicate with unfamiliar hearing people. This study added parent training to the therapy children received to investigate the benefits to generalisation of children's skills.

Aims:

1. To assess if parent training had an impact on the pupil's ability to (a) maintain their skills in trained tasks post-intervention, and (b) generalise their skills in untrained, community tasks.
2. To investigate if training parents improved their understanding of their child's needs and their skills in supporting their child appropriately in smiLE Therapy tasks.

Methods: Within this repeated-measures, within-subject, mixed-methods design study, 31 deaf pupils (aged 7 - 14) received an hour of smiLE Therapy per week, for six weeks. Communication skills were assessed at three time points. Parents were invited to attend two training sessions and asked to bring videos of their child communicating in a shop or café. Videos were used to assess child generalisation skill. Parents attended a focus group to discuss the effectiveness of the therapy in a wider context.

Results: All children significantly improved their scores following smiLE therapy (38% to 88%) and maintained these skills to high level (82%). Children generalised 78% of their newly learnt skills to an untrained situation. Parents observed their children's improved confidence and independence when carrying out communication tasks in the community.

Martina Curtin is a Specialist Speech and Language Therapist working at Whittington Health NHS Trust. Email: m.curtin@nhs.net