

## **How can helping our most vulnerable children to communicate change their lives?**

Children's vulnerability to inequalities in their life chances is complex. Developmental differences in children's speech, language and communication abilities is a critical part of this complexity. This talk highlights the vulnerability of children with developmental communication differences growing up in social disadvantage, in care, and with profound health and learning needs. Inequalities in their later life outcomes include educational attainment, their mental health and well-being, their independence and their life opportunities. There is a lack of research identifying persisting developmental communication differences in teenagers. Yet, the teenage years offer another opportunity to reduce inequalities for our most vulnerable children. This talk will also explore how developmental communication differences increase the complexity of children's vulnerability to unequal life chances, considering perspectives from longitudinal, clinical and lived experience research.

Identifying the most effective interventions to help our most vulnerable children and young people to communicate plays a crucial role in reducing inequalities in their life outcomes. Recent research supports the effectiveness of speech, language and communication interventions delivered by trained early years and school practitioners at scale as well as more targeted and specialist approaches. The challenges of showing if and how these communication interventions contribute to increasing life chances will be discussed, with specific reference to children with profound health and learning needs in the INTERACT trial.

Working effectively together across education, health and social care to understand and support children and young people with developmental communication differences is vital. Helping our most vulnerable children and young people to communicate is key to increasing equality in their life opportunities and changing their lives.