

TITLE: Staying faithful: Exploring the challenges of treatment fidelity in practice and research

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The LIVELY project (Language Intervention in the Early Years) aims to compare the efficacy of three different intervention approaches, each with a goal to improve the oral language skills of children (age 3;05 – 4;05) with severe language difficulties.

The three approaches include Building Early Sentences Therapy (BEST), the Derbyshire Language Scheme (DLS) and Continued Classroom Support (CCS). BEST uses 'usage-based' linguistic theory to support more flexible understanding and use of a range of sentences. An adapted version of the DLS is also considered. The DLS supports children's understanding and use of language by increasing the number of information carrying words that the child needs to understand. This approach has no explicit theoretical underpinning and has had limited evaluation. These approaches will be compared to CCS, where children will continue to receive the support that their school normally provides.

Treatment fidelity has been an important consideration in the research process of the LIVELY project, to ensure that the research assistants can carry out the interventions consistently. Key areas of consideration are manualisation of the interventions, consistency of resources, development of treatment fidelity checklists, and methods of supporting parents to access and engage with homework. Research assistants have kept weekly reflections and sessions have been video-recorded and monitored by supervisors.

In this presentation we reflect on the challenges, processes and importance of standardising interventions to be used reliably by different researchers and ideally in the future by varying teaching staff, in differing locations, and with a range of children. Key are issues of developing approaches that can be individualised to support children's specific needs. We discuss the importance of creating tools and interventions that can be evaluated and used in controlled research whilst devising a useful and impactful intervention for children and school staff in the real world.