

Case study

Another relatively frequent issue that we have found with young people is their weak understanding of the abstract concept of time. Most young people are able to use their phone to tell the time or read a digital clock but being able to tell the time and having a sense of time are different things. I worked with a 17-year-old young person who was referred to me because he had a hearing impairment. He was interested in working on a building site and the YJS Practitioner asked me to assess his understanding. It became clear over several sessions that this young person did not have a full understanding or sense of time. For example, I said to him 'I'll see you after the summer holidays', but he believed he would be finished with the SYJS by then. He was on a 6-month diversion order, so he clearly did not understand the difference between 6 weeks and 6 months. He could not perceive or feel the difference between the time quantities of 6 weeks and 6 months. He did not have an internal feeling or sense to refer to which would help him to understand these amounts of time.

Our understanding of the concept of time begins when we are very young. Babies start to notice patterns of events happening to them and in their environment, often dependent on a part of the day, for example getting up in the morning and going to bed at night. If someone is born into a chaotic environment, where there is limited structure, they might not have that foundation to build on as they grow up, which can affect their understanding and development in other areas. When you are at school, particularly primary school, there is a lot of support and structure but when you leave school that stops. In addition, we now live in a digital 24/7 age where the boundaries between night and day and the seasons of the year are less evident and meaningful to children and young people. I have worked with many teenagers who could not identify when the seasons occur. This may not seem important, but it would be if you were thinking of working on a building site! Young people without these developmental foundations can easily slip through the cracks. This kind of gap in understanding is unlikely to be picked up by teachers or even by parents. Not turning up for appointments can be a sign of difficulties in this area of understanding.