Communication Disorders

Know the warning signs. Your child may have an underlying problem in communication if he or she ...

- Began talking later than expected
- Is performing below expectations in the classroom
- Is having difficulty learning to read
- Cannot seem to express his/her thoughts and ideas
- Has problems understanding others and following directions
- Doesn’t pick up on social clues
- Has problems taking tests
- Says “huh” often and needs things repeated frequently
- Does not respond consistently to sounds

How can you get services from an audiologist or speech-language pathologist for your child?

- Meet with your child’s classroom teacher and school principal and talk about your concerns
UNDERSTANDING SPEECH-LANGUAGE SERVICES

Over 50% of all speech-language pathologists (SLPs) work in school settings. Speech-language pathologists focus on strengthening individuals’ communication skills with the goal of improving their performance in home, school, and work activities. The school-based SLP’s services benefit students who struggle to learn because their foundational speech and language skills are delayed or affected by their disability. Improving a child’s communication abilities improves their overall chances of success and boosts their confidence and quality of life.

WHAT DOES A SCHOOL-BASED SLP DO?

The school SLP participates as an equal member of the educational team. Speech-language intervention is directed toward helping a student achieve the educational goals agreed upon by the school team, including caregivers. The SLP contributes much to the discussion and decision making process by presenting key information about the student’s level of communication function, the impact of the communication impairment on successful participation, and strategies team members can implement in the classroom, the therapy room, and other settings to promote success.

To provide the best possible treatment for students, the SLP must collaborate with caregivers and other school team members. Some of the aspects that SLPs and educators should jointly discuss are:

- The student’s communication strengths and needs
- The academic and social demands placed upon him or her in the classroom
- The student’s interaction with peers
- Goals and treatment strategies that will facilitate positive change in communication skills
- Ways the student can be supported in the classroom
- Suggestions of instructional and environmental modifications that will lead to success

Each student has unique physical, sensory, neurological, emotional and mental functions as well as challenges, which enhance or deter successful school-related performance in the communication areas of education. Share your learning objectives, curriculum materials, and instructional methods with your school’s SLP. Join forces to determine how to best structure the classroom and instruction to support the student.
UNDERSTANDING
SPEECH-LANGUAGE
PATHOLOGY

Millions of children receive the help of speech-language pathologists (SLP) privately or in their schools. The SLP is an important member of the educational team, especially for students with disabilities that affect their ability to express themselves or understand what others are saying. There are many different reasons why individuals seek the help of an SLP. Communication challenges may result from a brain injury, developmental delay, autism, stuttering, or hearing impairments. Some children can't produce speech sounds correctly while others have difficulty expressing their needs and wants or organizing their thoughts. Speech and language impairments can contribute to significant learning challenges. SLPs help children develop and demonstrate communication skills that enable them to participate fully in class discussions, follow teacher's instructions, and learn to read and write. Speech-language pathologists help children achieve their academic goals!

WHAT DOES A SCHOOL-BASED SLP DO?

School-based speech-language pathologists assist children in accessing their education by helping them reach their full communication potential at home and in the classroom environment. Therapy sessions may include language drills, articulation and socialization games that focus on the child's expressive language, and listening comprehension activities that boost a child's receptive language abilities.

Areas of Communication Difficulties May Include

- Articulation
- Expressing wants, needs, and ideas
- Receptive language
- Stuttering/Fluency
- Voice
- Pragmatics
- Swallowing
- Social language skills
- Non-verbal expressions and gestures
- Formulating questions and responses
- Syntax
- Semantics
- Comprehending presented information
- Using vocabulary appropriately
- Intonation

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WHAT IS A SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST?

A Speech-Language Pathologist is a special kind of teacher who helps children improve their ability to use and understand speech and language so they can be at their very best when they communicate at school or home or with their friends. Speech-language pathologists help you practice your speech sounds, learn new words, or share your ideas with others by leading you through learning activities that help you build your skills.

WHO NEEDS SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY?
Sometimes, kids find it difficult to express themselves to their teachers, parents and friends. Finding the right words to tell someone a story or explain what you want or need can be frustrating. Other kids might know exactly what they want to say, but their mouth doesn’t quite get the words out right. Some words or letters are hard to say and your SLP will help you learn how to pronounce them correctly.

HOW DO I EXPLAIN MY THERAPY TO MY FRIENDS?
Ask your friends if they practice anything to get better at it. Do they play an instrument like a piano or a violin? Do they play sports like soccer or baseball? All of these activities require practice and are often taught by a coach. The more you practice something, the better you become at doing it. Think of your SLP as your “communication coach” who will help you practice your speech and language skills so that you can participate in classroom conversations with confidence!

Here are just a few things you can do to practice and improve your skills!

- Pick a recipe and help your parents cook. Read the ingredients out loud and talk through the directions step-by-step
- Create a play and perform it at home
- Read books
- Play board games
- Work on an art project, describe it to someone else
- Play house
- Make a collage out of items with the sound you need to practice. Show off your collage and name each item you included and explain why
- Conduct an interview with an interesting person and summarize key points with someone afterwards

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CONSIDER THESE THINGS WHEN TEACHING A STUDENT WITH SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DISABILITIES

- What type of speech and language skills does a student need to be successful in your class?
- Are there students who need directions repeated, rephrased or seen written as well?
- Are there distractions in the classroom such as, sights, smells, sounds and movement?
- Would changing a student's seat in the class improve his ability to see or hear you?
- Does performance improve when key vocabulary is highlighted?

ASK YOUR SCHOOL SLP TO TELL YOU ABOUT...

- Normal patterns and milestones for speech, language, and hearing development
- Steps they take to diagnose and treat communication disorders
- Major types of communication impairments they see in your school
- The relationship between speech, language and hearing to the education and learning process
- Treatment techniques that can be initiated in the classroom setting
- Parts of the curriculum that require strong communication skills for success
- Classroom modifications that may result in improved performance

WHAT KIDS CAN LEARN FROM SLPs

- How to organize and categorize their thoughts
- Learn how to say their sounds properly
- Help children speak in from of others with ease
- Ask questions appropriately and concisely
- Express wants and needs
- Help a child with language disabilities interact and engage with their peers
- Expand and understand vocabulary
- Work on social language i.e. analogies

TRY THESE STRATEGIES WITH KIDS IN YOUR CLASS TO IMPROVE DIRECTION FOLLOWING

Reduce the length of the instructions • Reduce the complexity of the instructions • Slow your rate of delivery • Repeat instructions more than once • Alter the mode for delivering instructions • Give prompts and assistance • Vary the tone and intonation pattern to emphasize key words

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GOALS AND OUTCOMES OF SPEECH-LANGUAGE THERAPY

The goal of speech-language therapy is to enable children to manage their disability/difficulties to further their success in the educational environment and is designed to support classroom objectives and expectations.

Parents play a vital part in the success of speech-language pathology. Clinicians work collaboratively with parents to determine individual goals for their child. Progress is measured throughout the year. As goals are met, SLPs work with parents and teachers to set new goals, make modifications in current goals, or reevaluate the child’s needs.

SPEECH-LANGUAGE THERAPY PROGRAM

- Model grammatically correct language in your home
- Explain words that are new for your child
- Describe your activities as you are doing them
- Turn off the television
- Give support but let them try to express themselves
- Read books with your children
- Include wordlist picture books in your home library and talk with your child about what is happening on each page
- Talk with your child even if they cannot respond
- Model speech sounds for your child if he says them incorrectly
- Give your child time to formulate his answers to your questions
- Accept signs and gestures as well as vocalizations for minimally verbal communicators. This will make your child less frustrated
- Expand on what your child says to increase expressive language
- Play games to practice concepts like taking turns, following rules and attending to a task
- Support your child to help complete homework assignments
- Build your child’s esteem by providing positive reinforcement
- Play games that help your child categorize
- Involve your child in cooking or baking activities. Talk out-loud about each of the steps
- Spend 5 minutes a day practicing sounds, words and sentence

IMPORTANT SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY PHRASES AND THEIR MEANINGS:

Receptive Language Disorder is a type of learning disability affecting the ability to understand spoken, and sometimes written, language. Students with receptive language disorders often have difficulty with speech and organizing their thoughts, which creates problems in communicating verbally with others and in organizing their thoughts on paper.

Expressive Language Disorder is a learning disability affecting communication of thoughts using spoken and sometimes basic written language and expressive written language.

Apraxia – The inability to communicate through controlled gestures of the body or face even if the individual is able-bodied and has the cognitive will to do so.

IEP – Individualized Education Program.

Syntax – The arrangement of words in a sentence.

Semantics – The interpretation of the meaning of a word or phrase.

Pragmatics – Rules of appropriateness for social language and communication.

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What You Can Do About Hearing Loss

Group Uses May's Better Hearing and Speech Month To Get The Word Out About Easing The Effects of Communication Disorders

(Rockville, MD - May 12, 2008) An estimated 28 million Americans have hearing loss. If you think you or a loved is among them, there is help. This May, and every May since 1927, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) has used the May is Better Hearing and Speech Month (BHSM) celebration as a time to encourage Americans to get their hearing tested and determine if they have a hearing loss.

You or a loved one may have a hearing loss if you:

- Frequently ask people to repeat themselves
- Often turn your ear toward a sound to hear it better
- Understand people better when you wear your glasses or look directly at their faces
- Lose your place in group conversations
- Keep the volume on your radio or TV at a level that others say is too loud
- Have pain or ringing in your ears
- Notice that some sounds remain clear (often low-pitched sounds such as the bass line in music) while others may seem fuzzy (frequently women's and children's high-pitched voices).

"People who see themselves in these statements should see an ASHA-certified audiologist for a hearing test," according to ASHA President Catherine Gottfred, PhD. "Even a very slight hearing loss can have an impact on your daily life. Hearing loss is treatable, and there is no reason for anyone to miss all the important sounds of life."

As a first step, people who think they may have hearing loss or other hearing disorders should see a certified audiologist. These professionals specialize in preventing, identifying, assessing, and treating hearing disorders. Also, they provide treatment for hearing loss including properly-fitting hearing aids and other assistive listening devices, and they can teach people with hearing loss how to concentrate on hearing all sounds.
Hearing loss often occurs slowly and has many causes, such as exposure to noise or hearing loss associated with aging. Because this type of hearing loss is entirely preventable, ASHA strongly advises that people use noise-canceling headphones or ear plugs when they are in noisy environments or activities.

ASHA recommends that children at risk for hearing loss, such as chronic ear infections or family history of hearing loss, be screened as frequently as needed to ensure they are hearing well. Otherwise, for children ages 5-18, hearing screenings should occur on initial entry into school and annually in kindergarten through 3rd grade as well as in the 7th and 11th grades. Also, an annual hearing checkup is a good idea for people from age 45 and older.

Consumers who think they may have a hearing disorder or know of a loved one who has a communication disorder should access ProSearch, ASHA’s online directory of audiology programs, to find an ASHA-certified audiologist in their area.

ASHA is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for more than 130,000 audiologists, speech-language pathologists, and speech, language, and hearing scientists. For free information or to locate an ASHA-certified speech-language pathologist or audiologists, consumers may call 800-638-8255 or visit www.asha.org.

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Information for Educators

Hearing loss can lead to numerous problems in school. Students with hearing loss can have difficulty with academic achievement, including language arts, vocabulary, arithmetic, and problem solving. They score lower on achievement tests, and have greater needs for special education or extra support in the classroom. Hearing loss can also cause social development problems.

Here are three things educators can take to help prevent hearing loss in their students:

1. Incorporate the topic of noise and hearing loss into your lesson plans or a classroom activity.
   Help students learn to identify the sources of noise in their lives, what they can do to keep noise levels down, and how they can protect their hearing. Use noise in the classroom as an example. (View lesson plans and classroom activities about noise and hearing loss.)

2. Be informed and aware about the implications of hearing loss in children.
   Hearing loss can affect a child in many ways including social interaction, communication skills, behavior, emotional development, and academic performance.

   Children with hearing loss typically exhibit delays and/or difficulty with:
   
   - Tasks involving language concepts
   - Auditory attention and memory, and comprehension
   - Receptive and expressive language
   - Syntax, semantics, and vocabulary development
   - Speech perception and production

   Academics: Children with hearing loss may have problems in various subjects, including language arts, vocabulary, reading, spelling, arithmetic, and problem solving
   
   - Lower scores on achievement and verbal IQ tests
   - Greater need for enrollment in special education or support classes

   Socially: Children with hearing loss may:
   
   - Have self-described feelings of isolation, exclusion, embarrassment, annoyance, confusion, and helplessness
   - Refuse to participate in group activities
   - Act withdrawn or sullen
   - Exhibit lower performance on measures of social maturity
   - Have significant problems following directions

3. Be aware of the warning signs.
   Does your student…
   
   - Frequently misunderstand what is said and want things repeated?
   - Have difficulty following verbal instructions and/or respond inconsistently?
   - Get distracted easily?
   - Have difficulty listening or paying attention when there is noise in the background?
   - Have speech and/or language problems?
   - Have a short attention span or poor memory for sounds or words?
   - Have trouble identifying and/or localizing sounds?

Additional Resources

- Noise and Hearing Loss
- Causes of Hearing Loss in Children
- Effects of Hearing Loss on Development
- Self-Test: Do You Have a Hearing Problem?
- More About Types of Hearing Loss
- Have reading, spelling, and other academic problems?
- Have self-described feelings of isolation, exclusion, annoyance, embarrassment, confusion, and helplessness?
- Have behavior problems?

Your Child's Hearing Development Checklist
Information about Otitis Media and Ear Infections
Resources from the Cochlear Implant Education Center
Resources from the Hearing Loss Association of America
Communications Considerations for Parents
Resources from the Alexander Graham Bell Association
Ear3 Personal Hearing Threat Detector