

Helping Students with Communication Disorders in the Schools

Speaking, Listening, Reading, & Writing

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What kinds of speech and language disorders affect children?

A. Speech and language disorders can affect the way children talk, understand, analyze or process information. Speech disorders include the clarity, voice quality, and fluency of a child's spoken words. Language disorders include a child's ability to hold meaningful conversations, understand others, problem solve, read and comprehend, and express thoughts through spoken or written words.

Q. How many children receive treatment for speech and language disorders in the schools?

A. An estimated six million children under the age of 18 have a speech or language disorder. Boys make up two-thirds of this population. Over one million children received services for speech or language disorders under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the 1997-98 school year. This number represents a 10.5% increase from a decade earlier (1988-89).

Q. How do speech, language, and hearing disorders affect learning?

A. Communication skills are at the heart of life's experience, particularly for children who are developing language critical to cognitive development and learning. Reading, writing, gesturing, listening, and speaking are all forms of language--a code we learn to use in order to communicate ideas.

Learning takes place through the process of communication. The ability to participate in active and interactive communication with peers and adults in the educational setting is essential for a student to succeed in school.

Q. Why are speech and language skills so critical for literacy?

A. Spoken language provides the foundation for the development of reading and writing. Spoken and written language have a reciprocal relationship-- each builds on the other to result in general language and literacy competence, starting early and continuing through childhood into adulthood.

Q. What are signs that a communication disorder is affecting school performance?

A. Children with communication disorders frequently perform at a poor or insufficient academic level, struggle with reading, have difficulty understanding and expressing language, misunderstand social cues, avoid attending school, show poor judgement, and have difficulty with tests.

Difficulty in learning to listen, speak, read, or write can result from problems in language development. Problems can occur in the production, comprehension, and awareness of language at the sound, syllable, word, sentence, and discourse levels. Individuals with reading and writing problems also may experience difficulties in using language strategically to communicate, think, and learn.

Q. How do speech-language pathologists work with teachers and other school personnel to insure children get the support they need?

A. Assessment and treatment of children's communication problems involve cooperative efforts with others such as parents, audiologists, psychologists, social workers, classroom teachers, special education teachers, guidance counselors, physicians, dentists, and nurses. Speech-language pathologists work with diagnostic and educational evaluation teams to provide comprehensive language and speech assessments for children.

Services to students with communication problems may be provided in individual or small group sessions, in classrooms or when teaming with teachers or in a consultative model with teachers and parents. Speech-language pathologists integrate students' communication goals with academic and social goals.

Q. How can speech-language pathology services help children with speech and language disorders?

A. Speech-language pathology services can help children become effective communicators, problem-solvers and decision-makers. As a result of services such as memory retraining, cognitive reorganization, language enhancement, and efforts to improve abstract thinking, children can benefit from a more successful and satisfying educational experience as well as improved peer relationships. The services that speech-language pathologists provide can help children overcome their disabilities, achieve pride and self-esteem, and find meaningful roles in their lives.