



PARENT LINK- INFORMATION SHEET no. 9

Speech and Language Difficulties

1. What are Speech and Language Difficulties?

Speech and language impairment disorders can vary greatly in severity.

Primary communication disorder - this is one where the child develops normally. There is no evidence that the difficulty is connected in some way with a physical or mental disability.

Secondary communication disorder - this may be associated with accident, cerebral palsy, specific syndromes or chromosome defects, injury or illness. some stage.

The pupil with speech and language difficulties will have difficulties with

- Using vocabulary effectively and understanding concepts.
Listening and attention.
All aspects of memory and sequencing.
- Comprehension and use of grammatical forms.
- Hypothesis, prediction, reasoning etc.
Understanding and use of appropriate social and conversational skills.
Perceiving and using the right sounds in spoken words.

2. Implications

All staff should be aware of indications of possible speech and language impairment.

Pupils who have receptive difficulties

- may have difficulties with listening at length, or be easily distracted
- may have difficulties with carrying out simple instructions, understanding simple stories unaccompanied by pictures
- be last in the group or class to do what you ask
- watch others closely for cues and clues and join in activities after they have begun
- may have difficulties with words relating to time, e.g. "tomorrow," "yesterday," "this afternoon"
- may have difficulties with "question words" - and give unexpected responses
- may have difficulties with words that change their reference in different circumstances - "sister," "mother," "brother"
- may have difficulties with understanding colloquial phrases, such as "pull your socks up"
- fail to process whole utterances
- be more interested in sounds and activities outside the room than spoken language addressed to him/her directly
- is slow to learn words of rhymes, poems and songs and needs a great deal of repetition/practice to do so
- gets the 'wrong end of the stick' in conversations and says odd things
- falls out with other children for no apparent reason
- may be more interested in visual than auditory activities.

Pupils who have expressive difficulties

- may have limited vocabulary - particularly "knowledge" vocabulary
- may have difficulties putting sentences together
- may have difficulties with pronunciation
- may have difficulties with word order
- may have difficulties with word boundaries

Pupils who have use of language difficulties

- may have difficulties with taking turns in conversation
- may have difficulties with gestures, facial expressions, non-verbal signs
- may topic hop
- may have difficulty with initiating conversations/topics smoothly and terminating them appropriately
- may have difficulty with asking questions/making requests/responding appropriately to questions and requests
- may have "odd" intonation patterns
- may not understand issues surrounding shared knowledge.

3. Strategies

*** You will need to access specialist advice from a speech and language therapist. You may need to draw up an individual programme.**

- reinforce verbal messages with visual material
- simplify sentences and reword if necessary
- clearly mark the need for attentive listening
- identify topics clearly, minimise topic change and signal changes before they happen
- work specifically on necessary vocabulary
- use more literal language for children who have difficulties with social language use
- be alert to use of idioms
- break up presentation of verbal messages, repeat them and ask children to repeat them
- make rules and expectations logical, chronologically ordered and explicit
- use opportunities for showing as well as/instead of telling
- teach precise word meanings

4. More information

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(your Speech and Language Therapy Service will depend on which Health Authority you are in)