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Speech and Language Impairment

What is a Speech and Language Impairment?

Arizona Revised Statutes (ARS) § 15-761(35) states that a “Speech/Language impairment means a communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, severe disorders of syntax, semantics of vocabulary, or functional language skills, or a voice impairment...to the extent that it calls attention to itself, it interferes with communication or causes a child to be maladjusted.”

When events such as illness or accidents occur before or after birth, abnormalities may appear during speech or language development. Language typically evolves in a very similar pattern among most children. Those states of development that do not occur on time and in sequence may indicate a problem with learning to communicate.

Speech language impairment (SLI) is sometimes present in children who are developmentally delayed or who have a physical condition such as a cleft palate. Sensory impairments which result in vision and/or hearing loss contribute to SLI as well.

Speech and language impairments fall into two major categories. One has to do with the formation and production of speech sounds (articulation). The other has to do with attaching words to objects and ideas, then stringing them together in a manner that makes sense (language and syntax).

Lisping is an articulation disorder that occurs when the improper placement of the tongue affects the production of speech sounds. Stuttering affects the smooth delivery of spoken language (fluency). It is considered a disability of childhood with onset before the age of six and is more prevalent in boys than in girls. The causes are not known, but are thought to be related to and triggered by specific situations.

Sometimes, parents are unaware of a speech/language problem until their child is screened for entrance to school. Kindergarten screening measures both expressive and receptive language development. Most screening devices check to see whether a child is developing typical language for his/her age.

How Common is a Speech and Language Impairment?

In the 2006–2007 school year, 24,003 students were classified as having a speech and language disorder and received special education services. This number represents 2.16% of the 1,112,610 children enrolled in Arizona public schools as of October 1, 2006, and accounts for 19.3% of the total special education population.

What Effects Do Speech and Language Impairments Have on Children?

Since language is essential for learning, early diagnosis and treatment of impairments is important. School success relies heavily on the ability of a student and his teacher to communicate, and on the student’s ability to build peer relationships. Language skills are critical in developing these relationships.

Because oral language proficiency is not regularly included in later academic testing, the initial recognition that a child has a language impairment may occur when problems begin to appear in their academic performance. The academic concerns would result in a screening and/or a comprehensive evaluation which would likely reveal the SLI. These problems may present themselves as a difficulty in understanding language, processing meaning, or expressing oneself in words.

References

Blumenthal, R. (1997). *Children with specific language impairment*. Cambridge, MA: Little, Brown & Co.

Heward, W.L. (1999). *Exceptional children: Introduction to special education*. (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Resources

Books for Adults

Berko, G.J. (1992). *The development of language*. NY: Macmillan.

Linfors, J.W. (1987). *Children's language and learning* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Reed V.A. (1993). *An introduction to children with language disorder*. NY: Macmillan.

Schwartz, S.M., & Heller, J.E. (1988). *The language of toys: Teaching communication skills to specialneeds children*. Rockville, MD: Woodbine House.

Silver, L.B., M.D. (1998). *The misunderstood child: Understanding and coping with your child's learning disabilities*. NY: Times Books.

Stuttering and your child: Questions and answers. Publication #22. Speech Foundation of America.

Books for Children

Cunningham, J. (1989). *Burnish me bright*. Magnolia, MA: Peter Smith Publishers.

Holcomb, N. (1990). *Sarah's surprise*. Hollidaysburg, PA: Nordic Publishers.

Kneeland, L. (1989). *Cookie*. Hollidaysburg, PA: Jason & Nordic Publishers.

Organizations/Web Sites

Arizona Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 7622 N. 48th Dr., Glendale, AZ 85301, 623-939-6103, www.asha.org

Council for Exceptional Children, Division for Children with Communication Disorders, 1110 N. Glebe Rd., Ste. 300, Arlington, VA 22201-5704, 888-232-7733, www.cec.sped.org

Disabilities Help Line of Arizona, Community Information and Referral Services, 1515 E.Osborn, Phoenix, AZ 85024-4446, 800-352-3792, 602-363-8856, www.cirs.org

Enhancing Arizona's Parent Networks (EAPN), www.azed.gov/ess/eapn

Easter Seals, 903 N. 2nd St., Phoenix, AZ 85004-1996, 602-254-3026; 3170 E. Ft. Lowell Rd., Tucson, AZ 85716, 520-327-1529; 661 E. 32nd St., Ste. A, Yuma, AZ 85365, 520-726-6800, www.easter-seals.org

Institute for Human Development, Assistive Technology Center, Northern Arizona University, P.O. Box 5630, Flagstaff, AZ 86011-5630, 928-523-5878, www.nau.edu/ihd

Learning Disabilities Association Of Arizona, 13106 W. Limewood Dr., Sun City West, AZ 85375, www.LDAAmerica.org

National Center for Neurogenic Communication Disorders (NCNCD). Bldg. #71, P.O. Box 210071, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721-0071, 520-621-1472, cnet.shs.arizona.edu/

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, P.O. Box 1492, Washington, DC 20013-1492, 800-695-0285, www.nichcy.org

Parent Information Network, Arizona Department of Education, Exceptional Student Services, 2384 N. Steves Blvd., Flagstaff, AZ 86004, 928-679-8102, 800- 352-4558, www.azed.gov/ess/pinspals

Special Education Guide, www.Parentpals.com

The Stuttering Foundation of America, P.O. Box 11749, Memphis, TN 38111-0749, 800-992-9392, www.stutterSFA.org

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