

Recognizing Speech-Language delay in school-age children: A Tutorial

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Purpose

- This tutorial was created for speech language pathologists to help classroom teachers to identify new/existing students who may need to be referred for speech language screening or comprehensive speech language evaluation
- To avoid **under referral** of students who are not mandated S/P services in the IEP but who may present with hidden speech/language based deficits which require remediation

Objectives

- After this presentation participants will be able to:
 - Summarize typical language development of preschool and school age children 4-13 years of age
 - Identify warning signs of speech language delay
 - Recognize when to request a speech language referral form from the speech language therapist to refer a student for screening/assessment



Preschool Children

Typical Language Expectations: 4-5 years olds

- Understand “when and “why” questions
- Follow 3+ step commands containing position words
 - Behind
 - In front
- Understands concepts
 - Bigger than
 - Smallest
- Describe sequence of events (3-5 parts in length)
- Recall 5+ facts from a familiar story

Typical Language Expectations: 4-5 years olds (cont)

- Define simple nouns
 - "What is a ball"
 - "What is a cup?"
- Use pronouns
 - He/she
 - His/those
- Able to hold a simple conversation with an adult
 - At least 3 conversational turns
- Can talk about what happened yesterday or what may happen tomorrow
- Presents with 90-100% speech clarity

When to refer

- If the child cannot follow 2+ step directions
- If the child has poor grammar and broken sentences
- If the child's language often does not make sense
- If the child's speech is difficult to understand
- If the child is stuttering

When to refer (cont)

- If the child's sentences are short
- If the child is unable to appropriately answer "wh" questions (e.g., 'why')
- If the child can't sequence pictures/information consisting of 3-4 parts
- If the child can't answer simple problem solving questions

School-Age Children

Typical Language Expectations: 6-7 years olds

- Understand complex instructions including concepts
 - First /last
 - Same /different
- Understand all types of “wh” questions
- Understand jokes and humor
- Coherently describe past events (e.g., what has happened yesterday; describe the safety of bus ride, etc)

Typical Language

Expectations: 6-7 years olds

- Produce coherent stories that center around a theme and contain a logical chain of events
- Able to take part in a longer conversations
 - Say things that are relevant to the conversation
 - Able to engage in multiple turns of conversation (5+)
- Speech is clear and easy to understand

When to refer

- Child's speech is difficult to understand
- Child is stuttering
- Child has difficulty responding appropriately to questions or instructions
- Child has difficulty speaking in longer sentences
 - Words are in the wrong order
 - Sentences are too simple
 - Immature vocabulary
- Child has difficulty maintaining a conversation with others
- Child can't answer problem solving questions
- Child exhibits "very poor" (subjective) social functioning

Typical Language Expectations: 8-11 years of age

- Understand words with multiple meanings
- Understand implied or suggested information in stories and conversations
- Understand metaphors and other abstract meanings (“it’s raining cats and dogs”)
- Listen and draw conclusions in subject area learning activities
- Form opinions based on evidence

Typical Language Expectations: 8-11 years of age (con't)

- Be able to follow a story without looking at pictures
- Summarize main ideas of stories/messages
- Learn new words in the classroom and make links between related information (evaluate)
- Relay a sequence of events or complicated stories
- Awareness of others' points of view and opinions

When to refer

- If the child has difficulty following instructions in class without prompting
- If the child has visible difficulties with memory
- If the child has difficulty processing information
- If the child is not able to follow a message or a story without repetitions or questions from staff
- If the child has limited vocabulary
- If the child has difficulty learning new words

When to refer cont

- If the child has difficulty understanding questions/problem solving
- If the child takes all sayings literally
- If the child has difficulty following a shared topic in a conversation (only want to talk about things that interest them)
- Many errors in the grammar of spoken speech
- Use non specific words like 'thing' and 'stuff' a lot
- Stutters or speech is difficult to understand

Typical Language Expectations:

12-13 years old

- Make planned oral presentations appropriate to the audience
- Summarize main ideas of stories/messages
- Can discuss abstract concepts and ideas that are not within own personal experience (e.g., how blood circulates through the chambers of the heart)
- Can use language to manipulate the behaviors, feelings and attitudes of other people
- Can transition from topic to topic with ease
- Can adjust vocabulary and modify language style (e.g., the rate of speech or the complexity of the message) to accommodate different listeners

Bottom Line:

When to refer

- When something just doesn't feel right!
- If you feel that there's something 'off' about the child's listening or speaking abilities then get the speech staff involved!
- Ask for them to observe the child or speak to them
- **They** will determine if further assessments are needed!

Do Not “wait and see”!

- **Rationale:** many educators believe that it’s a matter of lack of experience and that the child will “catch up” given **appropriate** classroom support
- **Problem I:** the children with language impairments will fall further and further behind
- **Problem II:** How do you determine appropriate support if the child has not been tested by a specialist so you do not know what will actually work for them!
- “The ‘wait and see’ period can be little more than the beginning or the extension of a cycle of communicative, academic, and/or social failure”
(Gillam & Peña 2004, pg 2)

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