



LANGUAGE



What is Language?

Language is used to communicate and convey meaning from one person to another. It is used to talk to each other, write and email and text.

Language has rules which involve word structure (morphology), grammar and sentence structure (syntax), word meaning (semantics) and social appropriateness (pragmatics).

What is a language disorder?

Children with language disorders may display difficulties with understanding (reception) and production (expression) of any of the areas of language. They may have difficulties with sentence and word structure, sound order, vocabulary and social use of language.

Difficulties that children experience are varied in severity. Some children with milder difficulties may have a language delay and their difficulties may resolve over time. Other children with more severe difficulties may have a language disorder, rather than a delay.

What causes a language disorder?

There are many factors, both known and unknown, that can contribute to a language disorder. Some examples are:

- Genetic disorders, such as Down Syndrome
- Prenatal exposure to toxins
- Infections, such as persisting middle ear infections (otitis media)
- Low birth weight
- Malnutrition
- Brain injury
- Environmental factors, such as poverty, abuse and neglect.

It is often the interacting nature of these and other factors which may result in a language disorder, however numerous cases of language disorders have no definite cause.

What are some facts about language disorders?

- Language disorders may occur at any stage of life.
- It is estimated that 577,000 school aged children have a language disorder (Speech Pathology Australia, 2006).
- If unresolved, childhood language disorders may result in future academic delay and behavioural and emotional issues.

What should I do if I think my child has a language disorder?

It is important to remember that every child develops differently. For more about normal development please see the information sheet “What is Normal?”. If you are concerned about your child’s language development, you should contact a speech pathologist. They are available on www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au . If your child is at school, speak to the classroom teacher or principal about referral to a speech pathologist for an assessment. A speech pathologist is trained to assess your child’s language and recommend any assistance or therapy that may be required.

What can I do to help my child develop language?

Children learn language by listening to and watching people communicate. There are many things you can do to encourage language development in your child. The following are some suggestions.

- Copy the playful sounds that your baby makes, to encourage two-way communication.
- Play simple games such as ‘peek-a-boo’.
- Talk using short sentences.
- Talk about and point to objects that can be seen and heard (e.g., bus, ball).
- Sing songs and rhymes together.

- Expand on simple words (e.g., if your child says ‘car’ then you can say ‘push the car’).
- Praise your child’s attempts to talk.
- Smile and show that you are listening.
- Look at books together and talk about the pictures.
- Talk about what is happening as you go about your daily life.
- Talk about what your child is doing.
- Make sure your child is looking at you, and you at them, when you talk.
- Go for walks, go to the park and other fun places, and talk about these places to help your child learn new words
- Encourage your child to watch television shows that will help them learn. Limit their television watching time so you have time during the day to do a variety of things with them.

For more development aids refer to the resources pages on the Royal Children’s Speech Pathology web page which provide some helpful tools.