

# SPEECH OR LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT

## ■ Definition of Speech or Language Impairment under IDEA

Speech or language impairment means a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairments, or a voice impairment, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.  
34CFR300.8(c)(11)

## TYPES OF SPEECH DISORDERS

**Speech Disorders:** Refer to difficulties producing speech sounds or problems with voice quality.

- **Articulation:** speech impairments where the child produces sounds incorrectly (e.g., lisp, difficulty articulating certain sounds, such as "l" or "r").
- **Fluency:** Speech impairments where a child's flow of speech is disrupted by sounds, syllables, and words that are repeated, prolonged, or avoided and where there may be silent blocks or inappropriate inhalation, exhalation, or phonation patterns.
- **Voice:** Speech Impairments where the child's voice has an abnormal quality to its pitch, resonance, or loudness.

## TYPES OF LANGUAGE DISORDERS

**Language Disorders:** Refer to impairments in the ability to understand and/or use words in context, both verbally, and nonverbally.

- **Expressive:** Difficulty in expressing ideas or needs.
- **Receptive:** Difficulty in understanding what others are saying.
- **Mixed:** Involves a mix of expressive and receptive difficulties.



## SPEECH AND LANGUAGE EVALUATIONS

- Evaluations consist of standardized assessment tools, observations, checklists, and language samples.
- Evaluation of speech skills may include articulation, voice, fluency, and oral-motor skills.
- Evaluation of Language Skills may involve receptive and expressive language, including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.
- Depending on the individual needs of the child, communication, Assistive Technology, and other special factors may be additional considerations for evaluation.
- Review of health and developmental histories as well as present levels of performance, as well as the child native language, social or cultural background will also be important considerations.

## POSSIBLE CAUSES

- Hearing Loss
- Neurological disorders
- Muscular disorders
- Developmental delays
- Brain Injury
- Mental Retardation
- Autism
- Cerebral Palsy
- Drug Abuse
- Vocal Abuse or misuse
- Other Unknown Causes
- Physical Impairments such as: cleft lip or palate; or paralysis of, absences of lesions or nodules on the vocal cords.

## INCIDENCE

- More than 1 million students who received special education under IDEA in public schools are served under the category of speech or language impairments.
- Because many disabilities do impact the individual's ability to communicate, the actual incidence of children with speech-language impairment is undoubtedly much higher.

## POSSIBLE SIGNS AND CHARACTERISTICS

- Speech and/or language skills that are noticeable behind their peers
- Partial or total loss of the voice
- Interruptions in the flow or rhythm of speech such as stuttering
- Articulation or phonological disorders
- Difficulties in the pitch, volume, or quality of the voice
- Improper use of words and their meanings
- Inability to express ideas
- Inappropriate grammatical patterns
- Reduced vocabulary
- Inability to follow directions
- Articulation errors, including omissions, substitutions, or distortions of sounds
- Possible low self-esteem/self-concept
- Inadequate social skills
- Difficulties in language processing
- Difficulties with vocabulary, sight words, decoding, and comprehension
- Difficulty writing down thoughts
- Fluency impairments, including abnormal rate of speaking, speech interruptions, and repetition of sounds, words, phrases, or sentences, which interferes with effective communication
- Difficulties with abstract ideas

## TEACHING TIPS/INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

There are many powerful things that general and special education teachers can do in class to support the learning of students with speech and language impairments.

- Always assume competence.
- Incorporate Literacy in Speech-Language Sessions

- Provide Visual Input for Visual Learners
- Model Fluent Reading (choral reading, paired reading, etc)
- Read, Read, Read
- Use multiple types of reading strategies (prediction, reader's theatre, etc.)
- Make sure that students receive accommodations listed in their IEPs.
- Collaborate with parents and other professionals.
- Be patient.
- Do not underestimate the student's intelligence or physical ability.
- If necessary, use other forms of communication such as sign language, symbols, sign cards, or communication boards
- Divide academic goals into small units, utilizing the same theme
- Offer maximal social interaction opportunities
- Interrelate all tasks in a progressive hierarchy, never moving to a higher step until accomplishing mastery
- Work at the student's pace
- Present only one concept at a time
- Provide verbal and tangible reinforcements
- Provide parents with information they can use at home to reinforce the in-school program
- Use computers in the classroom to present language units to the entire class
- Encourage reading and writing daily
- Use tactile and visual cues
- Incorporate vocabulary with unit being taught
- Provide fun activities that are functional and practical
- Be aware of the student's functioning level in the following areas and how they affect academic process: auditory skills, semantics, word recall, syntax, phonology, and pragmatics.

## THIS INFORMATION DEVELOPED FROM THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES:

- **ASHA/ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association**  
[www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org)
- **NIDCD/National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders**  
[www.nidcd.nih.gov](http://www.nidcd.nih.gov)
- **Cleft Palate Foundation**  
[www.cleftline.org](http://www.cleftline.org)
- **Childhood Apraxia of Speech Association of North America/CASANA**  
[www.apraxia-kids.org](http://www.apraxia-kids.org)
- **National Stuttering Foundation**  
[www.stuttersfa.org](http://www.stuttersfa.org)
- **National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities**  
[www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org)
- **Stuttering Foundation**  
[www.stutteringhelp.org](http://www.stutteringhelp.org)