



Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders OAFCCD

Language and the Adolescent

The ability to read and write is strongly influenced by the ability to understand and use language. Students who are good listeners and speakers tend to become strong readers and writers. Language has a major role in all subjects including reading, math, history, geography and even art.

The early school years emphasize language development, social-emotional growth and readiness skills. The middle grades emphasize specific subjects. Mastery of language is assumed. Emphasis is placed on written skills. The later grades involve more complex use of language by students including an increased vocabulary, more advanced sentence structure, and different kinds of language for different situations.

The importance of early identification and remediation of language delays or disorders in young children is well known. Less commonly known is the importance of identifying and remediating language disorders in the adolescent. Such disorders may lead to feelings of failure, low self-esteem, poor academic and social success and a high drop out rate.

Characteristics of Adolescent Language Disorder

- **Failure to understand** or pay attention to rules of conversation, for example, turn taking, introducing topics of conversation, and staying on topic.
- **Difficulty using different language** for different needs of the listener or situation.
- **Incorrect use of grammar**
- **Poor or limited vocabulary**
- **Difficulty requesting further** information to aid understanding.

What is Language Disorder?

Language Disorder refers to difficulties or impairment in:

- **form** including phonology, morphology, and syntax, for example, misuse or misunderstanding of the information provided by word endings: “The boy eat his dinner.”
- **semantics (meaning)**, for example, difficulty understanding idioms: “It’s raining cats and dogs.”
- **pragmatics (function)**, for example, using language for different purposes (promising, requesting), changing language for listeners needs (peer vs. teacher), or following the rules of conversation (turn taking, introducing topics of conversation, and staying on topic).

- **Tendency to ask questions** that are too general (“Are you going out tonight?” when what is really meant is “Where are you going tonight?”)
- **Tendency to agree** rather than voice opposition.
- **Indirect requests** and ambiguous statements.
- **Class clown behaviour.**
- **Extreme forgetfulness.**
- **Withdrawal** or exclusion from group activities.
- **Difficulty with:**
 - ☞ understanding non-verbal behaviours, such as body language
 - ☞ finding words
 - ☞ puns, idioms, riddles, jokes, sarcasm and slang
 - ☞ instructions, especially those that are long or grammatically complex
 - ☞ words with multiple meanings (bear versus bare)
 - ☞ sequencing
 - ☞ expressing thoughts
 - ☞ organizing information.

If you think your teen has any of these signs of a language disorder, speak to the Teacher, or Principal, and ask about a speech and language screening or comprehensive assessment by a Speech-Language Pathologist.

Source: From information on the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) Website: www.asha.org