

MAY IS SPEECH AND HEARING AWARENESS MONTH

Increasing Classroom Participation for Students with Language Disorders

WHAT is a language disorder?

Language impairment and language disorder are terms used interchangeably by many educators and speech-language pathologists to describe students with oral language skills [speaking and listening] that are significantly delayed relative to their peers. A language disorder may affect the content or meaning of a student's message, the structure of the message, and/or the appropriate use of oral language in context.ⁱ



WHO does it affect?

A longitudinal study led by Dr. J. Beitchman at the University of Toronto showed that language disorders affect more than 10% of 5-year-old children. Students were followed throughout school and into adulthood. Identifications of language disorders were relatively stable as the children aged. They persisted into adulthood and were associated with more negative outcomes for achievement and well-being than those observed for children without language disorders.ⁱⁱ

HOW does this affect students' performance in the classroom?

Students with language disorders may misunderstand social cues and lack the motivation to participate in the classroom, attend school, or engage socially with peers. They may struggle with understanding instructions and narratives, expressing their ideas, needs, and wants, and learning to read and write.

Specific Strategies to Increase Classroom Participation

Educators are encouraged to help students with language disorders by fostering a safe learning environment of acceptance and intentionally providing practice opportunities. Consider the following strategies:

Receptive Language Strategies

- Chunk information. Provide instructions one step at a time.
- Ask open-ended questions appropriate for student's language comprehension ability.
- Pair oral information with visual supports whenever possible.
- Rephrase, repeat, and review information.
- Allow for increased processing time.

Expressive Language Strategies

- Be student oriented. During activities involving oral language, intentionally pause and wait for students to initiate questions or comment.
- Give students the time to finish expressing their ideas. Try not to interrupt or fill in gaps for them!
- Prepare the student to answer specific questions prior to asking them in classroom discussions. For example, you may provide the student with the question 5 minutes prior to asking the student in front of the class so that they have time to prepare and formulate their response.
- Pre-teach unit vocabulary by providing students with a list of terms and their definitions.
- Consider having discussions in small groups to increase the students' opportunities to share. Link a series of comments and questions together to sustain conversational interaction with students for multiple turns.
- Prompt students as needed for more detailed oral and written responses.

If you have any questions about language disorders, please contact your school speech-language pathologist!

ⁱ Blaxley, B., Kyte, C., Leggett, J., McWhirter, S., & Minor-Corriveau, M. (2014). Oral language at your fingertips. OSLA: Toronto, ON.

ⁱⁱ Beitchman, J. H., Nair, R., Clegg, M., & Patel, P. G. (1986). Prevalence of speech and language disorders in 5-year-old kindergarten-children in the Ottawa-Carleton region. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders*, 51(2),98-110.

Johnson, C. J., Beitchman, J. H., & Browlie, E. B. (2010). Twenty-year follow-up of children with and without speech-language impairments. *American Journal of Speech Language Pathology*, 19, 51-65.