



Let's Talk

What Is the Difference Between Speech and Language?



“My son Jamie is having some trouble listening and understanding directions at day care. He can hear the teacher but just can't remember and follow what she says to do. His teacher also says that she sometimes can't understand what he is saying. We understand him fine at home. I'm not sure what the problem is.”

—Karl

Speech and Language

When we talk with others, we have to do many things:

- Understand what others are saying
- Know the right words for things
- Put words together into sentences
- Say sounds and words clearly so others can understand us

Some children have trouble with their speech. Some have trouble with language. Some have trouble with both.

Speech

Speech has three parts—articulation, fluency, and voice.

Articulation. This is how speech sounds are made. Your tongue, lips, teeth, and other muscles move together to make sounds. For example, you press your lips together and “hum” to make an “m” sound. It is very common for children to have trouble saying sounds when they first learn to talk. Most children speak clearly by the time they start kindergarten.

Fluency. When we talk, we are usually able to say a sentence or more without too much trouble. This is called fluent speech. If your child stops a lot or repeats sounds or words, he may be stuttering. Many young children repeat words or sounds between the ages of 2 and 4 while they are learning language. Most of them will stop stuttering or be more fluent as they get better at talking.

Voice. You need to make sound to talk. Sound comes from your voice box, or larynx. Voice problems happen when your child's voice doesn't sound right for his age or gender. For example, his voice may sound too high or low, too loud or soft, or hoarse. Voice problems do not occur very often in children.

Fast facts

- Speech is the way we use sounds to talk.
- Language is how we understand and use words and sentences.
- Some children have problems with both speech and language.
- Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, can help.

Language

Language includes listening, talking, reading, and writing. Your child uses language to:

- Understand what is said and follow directions
- Use words in the right order to say what she thinks, feels, wants, and needs
- Write down thoughts and ideas
- Understand what she reads
- Show that she knows what words mean and how to use them

When a child has trouble understanding others, it is called a receptive language disorder. When he has trouble sharing thoughts, ideas, and feelings, it is called an expressive language disorder. Children can have problems with both understanding and sharing ideas.

Your child may have trouble in school. Children who have language disorders may have a hard time reading and writing. Their grades may not be very good. Some may start to act out and have trouble getting along with others.

Worried About Your Child's Speech and Language?

Your child can have speech problems, language problems, or both. The problem can be mild or severe. In any case, a complete evaluation by a speech-language pathologist, or SLP, is the first step to getting help for language and speech problems.

“We took Jamie to see a speech-language pathologist. The SLP tested him and found that he isn't saying some of his speech sounds the right way, which makes it hard for others to understand him. He also has a language disorder, which is why he isn't following directions or saying a lot of new words. Now, the SLP sees him at day care and is helping him understand directions, use more words, and say sounds more clearly.”

—Karl

**Speech and language problems can make learning hard.
Help is available.**

To learn more about speech or language disorders call iTherapy at: (707)651-9915
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