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Occupational Therapy Speech Therapy

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Understanding the Variety of Ways

Speech Therapy Helps Children



Bonnie Hacker, OT
Founder / Director

When people think of speech and language disorders in children, their minds often focus on articulation disorders, which involve difficulties in producing intelligible words and sentences. Indeed, articulation disorders make up a large portion of the referrals received by pediatric speech pathologists. However, speech and language disorders comprise a much broader variety of communication difficulties, and speech therapists have methods for helping each of them. Being familiar with the variety of communication disorders will help ensure that children who need help are identified early and receive help in a timely fashion.

Language Disorders:

A child with a language disorder has difficulty communicating thoughts, needs, and ideas. It is an impairment in the ability to understand and/or use words in context, both verbally and nonverbally. Some characteristics of language disorders include:

- improper use of words and their meanings
- inability to express ideas
- inappropriate grammatical patterns
- confusing the order of words in a sentence
- reduced vocabulary
- echolalia (repeating words/sentences heard)
- extensive 'scripting' (repeating dialogue from videos or TV)
- difficulty following directions



Expressive language disorders place children at risk for future learning difficulties and are commonly found in children with autism spectrum disorders.

Speech Disorders:

The child with a speech disorder has difficulty producing speech sounds and/or problems with voice quality. Speech disorders commonly include problems with the way sounds are formed (articulation or phonological disorders), or difficulties with the pitch, volume or quality of the voice. Articulation disorders, a category of speech disorders, are characterized by the substitution of one sound for another, the omission of certain sounds, or the distortion of sounds. Children with speech disorders have trouble using some speech sounds past the time when they should have normally developed. They may say "see" when they mean "ski," or they may have trouble using other sounds like "l" or "r". Voice disorders might be characterized by an interruption in the flow or rhythm of speech, such as stuttering (dysfluency).

Speech and language disorders may present singularly or in combination. Children are often very challenged by their communication difficulties, and as a result, associated behavioral problems are not unusual. These include signs of frustration, anxiety, and/or tantrums. Depression can result in older children. While some children outgrow speech and language disorders without intervention, roughly half of children will not outgrow their difficulties. Among those children who ultimately score in the normal range on speech and hearing testing without intervention, ongoing learning problems are common. Research suggests that early identification and intervention is the best approach. When you suspect that a child is challenged by a communication disorder, please refer the family to Emerge-A Child's Place for assessment of the child, consultation with the parents, and appropriate intervention.

Please tell parents about Emerge – A Child's Place
Believing in a Child's Potential to Flourish