

Speech or Language Impairment (SLI)

DEVELOPMENT OF SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SKILLS

Speech and language skills develop in childhood according to developmental milestones. Sometimes parents and caregivers might become concerned if a child's language skills seem lagging behind (or different from) the language of their same-age peers. This may motivate concerned parents to look into the situation and eventually have the child evaluated by a professional.

There are different kinds of speech and language disorders that can affect children, and here are the four major areas in which the impairments occur:

- 1-Articulation:** the child produces sounds incorrectly (e.g. lisp, difficulty articulating certain sounds like "l" or "r").
- 2-Fluency:** the child's flow of speech is disrupted by sounds, syllables, words, that are repeated, held longer, or voided where there may be silent blocks of inappropriate inhalation, exhalation, or phonation pattern;
- 3-Voice:** the child's voice has an abnormal quality to its pitch, resonance, or loudness, and
- 4-Language:** the child has problems expressing needs, ideas or information, and/or understanding what others say.

Speech or Language Impairment

AAC definition:

Speech or Language Impairment means a communication disorder in the area of articulation, voice, fluency, or language that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

290-8-9.03(11)(a)

These areas are reflected in the Alabama Administrative Code's definition of speech and language impairment, and is used to authorize early intervention services available to children birth-age 2, and special education available to school-age (3-21) children with disabilities. Of the 6.1 million children with disabilities who received special education under IDEA 2004 in public schools in 2006, more than 1.1 million were served in the category of Speech and Language Impairment. This number does not include the children who have speech and language impairments along with other conditions, but were identified in the other category only.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SPEECH AND LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENTS

A child who has an Articulation Disorder leaves off certain sounds, adds or changes other sounds, which makes it hard for people to understand him. A child might say "wabbit" instead of "rabbit." This would not normally be a concern unless it continues past the age where the child is expected to produce sounds correctly.



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Special Education V.25

Page 1 of 5

Speech or Language Impairment (SLI)

A child who has a Fluency Disorder has a disruption to the rhythmic forward flow of speech, usually a stutter. Their speech has repetitions, prolongations, and hesitations, with tension in their shoulders, neck, face and fists.

Voice is produced when air from the lungs is pushed through the voice box in the throat, making the vocal folds vibrate. From there, the sound goes through the throat, nose, and mouth to emerge as our voice. A voice disorder involves the “speaking equipment” and can sound hoarse, raspy, “stuffed up,” nasally, and out of breath.

Language Disorders refers to an impaired ability to understand and/or use words in context. A child may have an expressive language disorder where they have difficulty expressing words or ideas. He might have a receptive language disorder where he doesn't understand what others are saying, or a mixed language disorder which involves both. Some characteristics of language disorders include:

- improper use of words and their meanings
- inability to express ideas
- inappropriate grammatical patterns
- reduced vocabulary
- inability to follow directions

Some of these symptoms are similar to other disabilities such as Autism or learning disabilities, so it is important that the child receives a thorough evaluation from a certified speech-language pathologist.

GET HEARING CHECKED

Have your child's hearing checked. He may have a hearing impairment that is interfering with language development. Also, realize that a language delay isn't the same thing as a speech and language impairment. Language delay is very common in preschool, and just means that your child's language is developing, only at a slower rate. It is important to get help for your child as soon as possible since all communication disorders have the negative effect of isolating children from their social and educational surroundings.

HELP IS AVAILABLE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Two systems of help are available to help eligible children with Speech and Language impairments. Those special services are:

Early Intervention-a system of services to support infants and toddlers with disabilities (birth through age 2) and their families. If a child is found eligible for Early Intervention services, staff work with you to develop what is known as an Individualized Family Services Plan or IFSP, which will describe your child's unique needs as well as the services he will receive to address those needs. Contact Alabama Early Intervention Services at 1-800-543-3098.

Special Education and Related Services-Services available through the public school system for school-aged children, including preschoolers (ages 3-21). The federal special education law called IDEA, and corresponding state law called Alabama Administrative Code (AAC), require that special



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Special Education V.25

Page 2 of 5

Speech or Language Impairment (SLI)

education and related services be made available free of charge to every eligible child with a disability, including preschoolers. These services are designed to address the child's individual needs in the classroom resulting from the disability.



REFERRAL AND EVALUATION

If you feel your child is in need of special education and related services, the first step is to make a referral to your child's school indicating the challenges you've noticed, and request an evaluation for a disability. The team will review all data and if the referral is accepted, a formal referral form is completed that must include written consent from the parent. The school has 60 calendar days from written consent to complete the evaluation process. If the referral is not accepted, written notice is given to the parent, and the child is referred to the school's problem-solving team at school.

Keep in mind that a child does not have to fail in school to be eligible for special education services. A referral for special education should never be denied based solely on the student having passing grades.

An evaluation is the process of gathering information about your child, their potential disability, strengths, weaknesses, and areas of

need. If your child is struggling in school and you are concerned about their learning, educational progress, social skills, or behavior, comprehensive special education evaluation may be the information that can help you and your child's school to meet your child's educational needs. The initial evaluation will serve to answer these questions:

- does my child have a disability?
- does his disability affect his educational performance?
- does my child need special education and related services?

Just the mere presence of a disability does not automatically qualify your child as "a child with a disability" under special education laws. Your child must meet the criteria listed for Speech and Language Impairments using certain minimum evaluative components. The criteria is somewhat different for each of the three areas of speech and one in language. A vision/hearing screen must be satisfactory. Standardized or formal measures must show deficits that are noticeable and distractible to any listener, with documentation that the child's ability to communicate is adversely affected by the disorder. There must be documentation of the medical diagnosis for the language disability.

DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY

When the evaluation process has been completed, the team has 30 days to review all the assessment data and scores, meet with all the other team members, including parents, and make an eligibility decision.



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Special Education V.25

Page 3 of 5

Speech or Language Impairment (SLI)

The team will collaborate and create a written report of the testing results. The report will describe your child's strengths and needs, how your child's skills compare to others of the same age or grade level, whether your child has a qualifying disability, and what individualized instruction and related services are recommended to help your child. If you disagree with the report, you have the right to request an independent educational evaluation or IEE, paid for by the school. The school is also allowed to deny your request for IEE, but it must take additional steps to prove its evaluation is appropriate.

If your child is identified as **“a child with a disability”** and determined to be eligible, a meeting to develop the Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be held within 30 calendar days of the initial eligibility determination. The data obtained during the evaluation is used to determine what services are required for the child to make educational progress. An IEP must be developed and in effect before special education and related services are provided. The school must obtain written informed consent from the parent before the initial provision of services to the child.



The types of services provided to each child are designed to meet their unique needs, but could

include speech and language pathologist services including: individual therapy for the child, consultation with the child's teacher about the most effective ways to facilitate the child's communication in the classroom, or working with the family to develop goals and techniques for effective therapy in class and at home. Assistive technology could also be very helpful to students whose physical condition makes communication difficult. An electronic communication device is an example of AT that could help a student interact with other students in the classroom, and demonstrate their learning.

Sometimes the test scores and data do not meet the qualifying criteria for disability, and your child is denied eligibility for services. If you disagree with the ineligibility decision, you have the right to appeal this decision and should inform the school at once. You will receive a written copy of your Special Education Rights from the school, which contains information on due process procedures to follow. Ask if your child could benefit from 504 plan services. You can also contact our staff for assistance.

RESOURCES

Alabama Department of Education, Special Education Services www.alsde.edu/sec/ses/

Children's Rehabilitation Services www.rehab.alabama.gov/crs

Alabama Early Intervention Service <http://www.rehab.alabama.gov/individuals-and-families/early-intervention>



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Special Education V.25

Page 4 of 5

Speech or Language Impairment (SLI)

Apraxia Kids <https://www.apraxia-kids.org/>

We Stutter <https://westutter.org/>

Stuttering

Foundation <https://www.stutteringhelp.org/>

YOUR OPINION MATTERS

Stakeholder opinion is very important to our center. We invite you tell us what you think and make suggestions for trainings and publications. Complete a brief survey, call our center, or join our advisory committee. Your input is always welcome. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ALPT>

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APEC IS HERE TO HELP

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Special Education V.25 SLI



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Special Education V.25

Page 5 of 5