

LANGUAGE DISORDERS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Context/Setting:

- 1. Conduct language interventions in situations that are representative of “real life”** for the student whenever possible so that the actual uses and functions of language are learned. Opportunities for using language are inherent in day-to-day experiences across the curriculum and in informal encounters at school and home, and these opportunities should be capitalized upon.
- 2. Use highly structured settings for students who cannot attend to and learn language skills in a more typical environment.** These settings may feature such characteristics as plain walls, limited sensory input, and exaggerated text sizes and/or colors. However, it should be cautioned that highly structured interventions alter the nature of the environment and may be difficult to generalize to other settings.
- 3. Keep unwanted noises** (e.g., from outside, gymnasium, music room) **out of the student’s classroom as much as possible** so that the student can attend to language within the room. Noise within the classroom can be reduced by placing rubber boots on chairs and laying carpeting or rugs on concrete floors.
- 4. Maintain consistency among school personnel and the student’s family.** Home programs should be provided so the content, form, and use of language interactions can be facilitated in all environments.

Curriculum and classroom activities:

- 1. Address attending and listening skills.** Such skills can be addressed through auditory memory and recall games such as “Whisper Down the Lane.” Other ideas are rhymes that feature alliteration, such as “She sells sea shells...” and activities that require the student to identify where a certain sound occurs within a given word (beginning, middle and end.)
- 2. Share books with the student, and allow him/her to make guesses or predictions based on context.**
- 3. Choose reading materials that reflect the student’s language experience, familiar vocabulary, sentence structures and sentence patterns.** More complex written materials should be adapted or reduced. This compatibility will maximize comprehension and encourage verbalizations. The same can be said for other learning tasks, whether presented orally or in writing.
- 4. Use rhyming songs and poems with the student.** Such activities will help the student to tune into the phonetic sounds of different vowels, consonants, and blends.

5. Utilize Language Experience Programs that integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing. Such approaches coordinate all aspects of the language process into a meaningful experience for the student.

6. Utilize multi-sensory modes of teaching which include visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile components.

7. Emphasize turn-taking as a social convention that is fundamental to effective communication. The student with language difficulties should have the opportunity to participate in board games and relays to encourage turn-taking. The use of telephones and walkie-talkies are other ways to practice this skill.

8. Incorporate direct instruction in and practice with the following: greeting others, asking questions, making requests, asking for help, and giving messages to others, which are all important social interactions.

9. Try the pause, prompt, praise method. Pause to allow the child time to think and respond, prompt the child if necessary, and praise them for his/her effort.

General Strategies:

1. Provide ample opportunities in communicating. Make language purposeful, meaningful, and enjoyable for the student.

2. Consistently model appropriate language use for the student and encourage imitation. Reinforce all of the student's attempts. For many students, an appropriate response to their attempts at language may be the only reinforcement needed, as this signifies that they are successfully communicating and interacting socially.

3. Avoid drawing attention to or correcting errors the student makes. Instead, provide clear, distinct models in reply.

4. Paraphrase the student's contributions so that he/she can hear interpretations of what has been said.

5. When needed, provide forced alternatives (e.g., "Would you like _____ or _____?") so that the student can imitate appropriate responses.

6. Provide contextual cues for the student whenever possible in language interactions.

7. The focus should be kept off behaviors as much as possible if behavioral problems result from the student's frustration with challenges in communication. Instead, energy should be channeled into aiding the student in building language competencies, which should help to eliminate the need for behavioral outbursts.

8. Gain child's attention when you talk together. For example, say, "Ryan, come over here please" instead of "Please come over here, Ryan." This focuses the child when they hear their name and readies them for the directions that follow.

9. Encourage the child to communicate in any way possible. Actions and gestures will develop to words and phrases with proper assistance.

Strategies for Improving Semantics (meaning of words and word relationships):

1. Encourage the student to name and classify pictures into categories.

2. Provide the student with sentence completion tasks. Such tasks may provide typical contexts and multiple choices (e.g., "I held the door open/off") or analogies (e.g., "I drive a car and I fly a _____").

3. Cloze procedures are also helpful with semantic difficulties. They feature missing words at any point in the sentence, rather than only at the end. The student is asked to fill in the word, or even to give several possibilities. The benefit of such a procedure is that nouns, actions, attributes, or a combination can be omitted, depending on the needs of the individual student.

4. Introduce common prepositions in relation to the student's body and/or use concrete manipulatives for students experiencing difficulty with spatial concepts.

5. Use games such as "20 Questions" to encourage the student to identify a certain word through formulating and asking yes/no questions about the word. Along the same lines, riddles require a student to name a word based on a description or definition.

6. Use word-retrieval cues such as:

- Naming the semantic category to which the word belongs (e.g., type of car, insect)
- Synonyms (e.g., "Another word for lady is (woman)")
- Antonyms
- An associate word (e.g., "bread and (butter)")
- The beginning of sounds or syllables
- A rhyming word
- Multiple choices

7. Use word association tasks to facilitate the accuracy, fluency and speed of word retrieval. Among them are:

- Free association tasks ("Name as many things as you can think of in the next minute")
- Controlled association tasks ("Name as many foods as you can think of in the next minute")
- Synonym or antonym recall
- Semantic class naming.

8. Encourage the student to create sentences using provided words, whether nouns, verbs, or adjectives. Such tasks provide practice in flexibility and elaboration of language. Similarly, the student's ability to describe cause and effect events can be facilitated through the use of sentence and story completion tasks. A group of students can be asked to participate in a serial story activity, each building on the last sentence of the story.

Strategies for Improving Syntax (rules of forming sentences):

1. Use sentence completion and cloze techniques, as discussed above, for syntactic problems as well.

Examples:

Sentence Completion: "The bus was slow. It was driving very (fast/slow/slowly)."

Cloze (oral or written): "Jane saw the woman (who/what/which) lives next door."

2. Present the student with printed or spoken sentences in which the order of words, phrases, or clauses is violated. Each word, phrase, or clause should be printed on a separate card so that the student can manipulate and arrange the parts into a correct sentence.

3. Encourage the student to formulate and produce a sentence with structure similar to that of a spoken model sentence.

The model sentence should be presented along with a picture representation, and a second picture of a related situation should also be provided to elicit the sentence from the student.

4. Encourage the student to paraphrase. This requires the student to rephrase underlying meaning while using a different structure (ex. Stimulus sentence: "The bus was followed by the police car." Paraphrase: "The police car followed the bus.")

5. Provide the student with opportunities to transform components into complex sentences. This task may require the student to choose from several options or to spontaneously produce the transformation. For example:

Sample: Ellen carries her umbrella. It is raining.

Choices: Ellen carries her umbrella after it is raining.

Ellen carries her umbrella because it is raining.

Ellen carries her umbrella then it is raining.

6. Encourage the student to resolve complex sentences into their components.

Again, the student may be asked to do so spontaneously or to choose from presented options. For example:

Sample: The boy who lives next door found my cat.

Choices: The boy found the cat.

The cat found the boy.

The cat lives next door.
The boy lives next door.

Strategies for Improving Articulation:

- 1. Foster a warm, supportive environment in which the student will feel accepted and encouraged to speak and respond to others.** In order to achieve such an environment, other students or family members may benefit from education about speech problems. Such education may make them less likely to ridicule or become frustrated with the student with articulation difficulties.
- 2. Provide listening activities that build awareness of sounds.** For instance, read a list of words and ask the student to clap every time he or she hears a certain sound. Specific problem sounds can be targeted this way.
- 3. Utilize rhymes, riddles and activities involving locating objects/pictures that begin with the sounds.**
- 4. Take time to listen to the student and try to understand what is being said, even if it is difficult.**
- 5. Modify a board game for young children by requiring child to produce a target sound in isolation following a model in order to move the game piece.**

Strategies for Improving Stuttering:

Background: Stuttering or stammering refers to involuntary verbal disfluencies demonstrated as repetitions of sounds, blocked speech, elongated sounds, or prolonged pauses between words and sounds. A variety of factors may contribute including genetics, cognitive processing abilities, and environmental influences.

Normal or Problematic? 20% of all children encounter disfluencies at some point. Nearly 5% of all children go through a period in which they stutter for 6 months or more and three-quarters recover by late childhood. Disfluencies most often occur in preschool/kindergarten to early elementary age children. Normal disfluencies are occasional (not more than one every 10 sentences); brief (half second or shorter); and are repetitions of sounds, syllables, or short words. There may be occasional pauses, fillers (um, uh) or changes in words. Disfluencies tend to come and go when the child is excited, tired, talking about new or complex topics, or asking/answering questions. When normal, the child has no negative reactions to their disfluencies. In such cases the child should be referred to a speech pathologist for assessment only if parents are overly concerned.

Greater concern should exist when disfluencies are frequent (3% or more of speech); long (one-half to one second) repetitions and elongations of sounds. They are associated with physical manifestations such as eye blinking, looking to the side and tension around

the mouth. Disfluencies may come and go depending on the situation but are more often present than absent. The child is likely to show some frustration or embarrassment. The child should be referred for an evaluation if stuttering continues for 6 to 8 weeks.

Recommendations:

1. Do not pretend the disfluencies don't exist. This only serves to isolate the child and sends the message that stuttering is something to be ashamed of.

2. Show your support. Let the student know his stuttering is okay with you and you accept him or her just like any other student

3. Find out the child's opinion about reasonable classroom expectations. Some children are more uncomfortable about their stuttering than others and may react in different ways in the classroom. Talk to the student in private about how they feel about being called on unexpectedly or other speaking situations.

4. Speak slowly and clearly. Do not over-exaggerate; simply provide a good speech model by speaking at an easy pace.

5. Use shorter and simpler sentences, as long and complex sentences also serve as fluency disruptors. Use vocabulary the student is familiar with.

6. Avoid interrupting when the student is speaking. Additionally, avoid filling in words or finishing sentences for the student who stutters. Be patient and maintain good eye contact.

7. Allow the student time to respond in class. Similarly, take longer pauses before beginning your turn in conversations. Wait two seconds before you answer a questions and use more pauses in your own speech to decrease time pressure and model wait time.

8. Avoid making suggestions to improve fluency unless the suggestions have been provided by the student's speech and language pathologist. Refrain from comments such as "Slow down," "Take a deep breath," and so on.

9. Compliment and praise the student's efforts unconditionally.

10. Reduce or eliminate activities within the classroom that reinforce debate and verbal competitiveness, as these sorts of competitions may increase frustration, anxiety, and stress. Avoid stressors in communication such as time limits and encourage teamwork.

11. When reading aloud, allow the student to read along with someone else. Many children that stutter are more fluent when speaking in unison. Have the whole class read in pairs so the student is not singled out.

12. Know what situations cause more stuttering. Stuttering often increases when students are nervous, excited, upset, or are asked to speak unexpectedly.

13. Listen attentively to the child's message rather than their speech pattern.

14. Understand that people that stutter have good days and bad days. Some days a child's stuttering may not be as bad or may be worse than usual. Encourage the child to speak more on good days to build his or her confidence and be more understanding on bad days.

Resources:

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www.ican.org.uk/pdf/profs3.PDF: Language Difficulties in School.

www.ican.org.uk/TalkingPoint/Frontpage.aspx

www.ican.org.uk/upload/appdfs/ican/tipsfortalking.pdf

www.stutteringhelp.org: The Stuttering Foundation of America Page

www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/stuttering.htm: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

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