

Language Delay

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Speech and Language delay in children can cause issues in communication, oral function and socialisation. The cause of language delay will vary from child to child and can be a result of hearing loss, physical impairments, brain injury or intellectual impairment. However, sometimes the cause is unknown. A child's communication is considered delayed when the child is noticeable behind in the acquisition of speech and language skills to that of his or her peers.

Communicating is the act of imparting and receiving information. This effective communication underpins all aspects of quality care. With a child who has a disability, communication is frequently a secondary disability. All communication has a developmental base and language does not develop in isolation.

Initially, it is important to have an understanding of the stages of communication in a child's development. There are four major elements within the process of language development:

- Inner language – ability to communicate with oneself. Developed by actively interacting and manipulating one's environment.
- Receptive language – ability to understand others. Child uses symbols to connect objects with their names.
- Interactive language – ability to synthesize information by classifying and requiring more than short term memory.
- Expressive language – ability to make oneself understood.

Effects on Developmental Areas

Social and Emotional

- May have minimum social experiences
- May experience difficulties making and keeping friends
- May become depressed
- May lack certain amount of independence
- May have attacks of rage and aggression

Motor and Physical Development

- May have developmental delay in physical areas

Language and Communication Development

- May have difficulty speaking
- May not understand or use appropriate forms of communication
- May have difficulty in making or expressing choices

Cognitive

- May have learning difficulties
- May not stay long at activities due to low concentration span
- May require instructions, directions etc. to be repeated 2 or 3 times and requires some time to process before responding or acting
- May have delays in skills of concentration, memory and ability to generalise
- May have difficulty understanding concepts of turn taking, sharing and how to enter into play situations

Language Delay Inclusion Strategies

Each child diagnosed with **Language Delay** will be different and individual. It is important to gain information from the parents as to what characteristics of **Language Delay** their child displays. It is important to work closely with the parents as well as any additional support specialists e.g. therapists who may be involved with the child. It is also important to gain an understanding from the parent as to what is the most important aspect of their child attending your service. What is it that parents hope to gain from using your service? The following inclusion strategies are just some examples which may be applied to support the inclusion process. This list is only the start and it is dependant on a variety of factors such as environment, length of time child is in care, child's interest, likes, dislikes and skills already achieved. The strategies are divided into developmental areas however some strategies overlap and assist in a variety of developmental areas.

Social Development

- On arrival and farewell and when wanting child's attention say the child's name first to catch his attention e.g. "Jack, good morning" rather than "Good morning, Jack".
- Explain what you are doing when you are doing it when presenting an activity, giving instructions or encouraging turn taking/sharing.
- Provide a quiet area with objects for child to explore independently.
- Let other children know what child is doing to reinforce the concept of him being part of the group. Do this with all children e.g. "Look Jack is doing a puzzle as well".

Physical Development

- Keep things in the same place to assist child to be able to move from one place to another. If you change the environment walk and talk this through with the child.
- Count stairs, number of steps from each room to aid independence.
- Provide finger plays to encourage the use of both hands in a controlled manner as well as developing fine motor skills.
- Provide lock boxes and musical boards to promote finger and wrist movement and rotation.

Language

- Utilise the use of large clear pictures to reinforce what you are saying.
- Para-phrase back what the child has said.
- Clarify types of communication methods the child may use e.g. Makaton.
- Provide puppets/pictures as an extra prop when using finger plays and songs.
- Reduce the amount of instructions in one statement to allow time for the child to gain an understanding of what is been said e.g. "Hold the puppet up high" rather than "hold the puppet up high and wave it around so that all the children can see it." Once child understands to "hold the puppet up high" you can then add "Good, now all the children can see it".
- Ascertain from parents words that are familiar with the child e.g. family words that represent aspects of child life, and use these in your program.

Cognitive

- Encourage use of a bright easily recognisable bag for child to be able to recognise his hook/locker.
- Gain information from parents about child's likes, interests and dislike and incorporate these in your program.
- Break tasks down to smaller steps e.g. placing one puzzle piece in a time rather than expecting the puzzle to be completed.
- Allow the child time to complete tasks and practice skills at own pace.
- Acknowledge level of achievement e.g. "you have placed that piece in the puzzle, well done" rather than just "Good boy".

Reference

Aspen Reference Group

Caregiver Education Guide for Children with Developmental Disabilities. Aspen Publication 1997 ISBN 0834210347

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More than Just Words A handbook of Games and Activities to help include children with language and communication impairments.
Playcare PROGRAM & Dept Families, Youth & Community Care
1998

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