

# Speech or Language Impairment Fact Sheet



## Speech Therapy

Communication skills are at the heart of the education experience. Eligible students with speech or language impairments will want to take advantage of special education and related services that are available in public schools.

Speech-language pathologists can assist children in various ways. They provide individual therapy for the child, consult with the child's teacher about effective communication, and work closely with the family to develop goals and techniques for effective therapy in class and at home. Technology can help children whose physical conditions make communication difficult. The use of electronic communication systems allow nonverbal people to engage in shared thought.

Adapted from NICHY (2011)

## What are Speech and Language Impairments?

Speech and language disorders refer to problems in communication and related areas such as oral motor function. These delays and disorders range from simple sound substitutions to the inability to understand or use language or use the oral-motor mechanism for functional speech and feeding. Sometimes a child will have greater receptive (understanding) than expressive (speaking) language skills, but this is not always the case. Speech disorders refer to difficulties producing speech sounds or problems with voice quality. Language disorders involve an impairment in the ability to understand and/or use words in context, both verbally and nonverbally.

## Definition of Speech/Language Impairment under IDEA

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), defines Speech or Language Impairment as...

Speech or language impairment means a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. [34 CFR §300.8(c)(11)]

## Characteristics of Speech or Language Impairments

- Fluency refers to the flow of speech. A fluency disorder means that something is disrupting the rhythmic and forward flow of speech—usually, a stutter.
- Articulation disorders involve difficulty making certain sounds. These sounds may be left off, added, changed, or distorted
- A voice disorder involves problems with the pitch, loudness, resonance, or quality of the voice.
- Some characteristics of language disorders include improper use of words and their meanings, inability to express ideas, inappropriate grammatical patterns, reduced vocabulary, and inability to follow directions.

Note: English Language Learners (ELL) are children who speak a language other than English. These children are challenged by learning the language spoken in school and are assisted by special instructors, called ELL instructors. Sometimes these students may also have speech or language problems. In these instances, a speech-language pathologist may evaluate the student's speech skills using an interpreter.