

Later Diagnosis

Question: Are all language disorders identifiable (or identified?) in young children or will some become evident in adolescents?

Answer: Dr Barbara Ehren (USA)



Many language disorders are found in young children. However, it is also possible that difficulty with language only become evident when the demands for language increase as children get older, especially as academic demands increase. It is important to recognize that the use of oral language for social interaction does not typically require the same level of semantic and syntactic complexity as does written language. Therefore, reading and writing may be the language processes within which some language disorders are diagnosed. Language disorders can be identified in the adolescent population that were not uncovered in earlier years, given that their schooling includes complex academic demands with higher order thinking that requires more complex language. It is critical that speech-language pathologists work with classroom teachers to identify language correlates of academic problems adolescents may be experiencing and to integrate language intervention with language sensitive classroom instruction.

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Question: How do language disorders affect academic achievement in adolescents?

Answer: Dr Barbara Ehren (USA)

Adolescents who struggle with language have difficulty learning school subjects like history, science, mathematics, and literature. Language in aural, print and digital forms is the medium through which subject content is communicated. As ideas increase in complexity through the grades, the language to convey those ideas becomes more complex. Therefore, students who struggle with language typically fall behind in academic achievement. Further complicating the issue is that each subject area has its own literacy, that is, its own unique way of speaking and writing, not only with different vocabulary, but with different patterns of syntax and macrostructures. Hence, the added burden for children with language disorders, as they get older, is that they have to navigate disciplinary literacy. For example, in science class, the adolescent has to listen, speak, read and write like a scientist to grasp that content, then switch gears quickly when going into a history class where the literacy patterns are different.

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