



Let's Talk

Language Disorders in Teenagers

“Our son Brian is repeating the seventh grade. Brian likes and does best in art. He has trouble with his other classes. His teachers say that he has problems following directions, can't keep his papers together, and often is the “class clown.” He has trouble getting along with other students, and often gets mad and skips school. We are having him tested to see what is going on.”

—Liza and Ray

Have You Been Told That Your Teen Has a Language Disorder?

A teenager with a language disorder may have problems using different parts of language. He may have trouble:

- Understanding and using a variety of different words
- Following directions or long instructions
- Remembering what people say
- Understanding jokes, riddles, slang, or words with more than one meaning, like bear and bare
- Asking questions and getting information to help understand
- Finding the right words to say
- Putting thoughts into words
- Organizing information or remembering the right order of words

Your teen might also have trouble socially. She may have a hard time:

- Making friends
- Taking part in group activities
- Using body language and gestures, like giving people space or using facial expressions when happy or mad

Fast facts

- Teenagers can have language disorders.
- Language disorders can lead to problems in school, with friends, and at home.
- Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, can help.



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Why Does My Teen Have Language Problems?

There can be many reasons why your child has language problems. Some teens have had language problems since they were young. Others may start to have problems as they get older. These teens may not be able to “keep up” with the language demands of middle or high school.

In some cases, a teen may have a language problem from an accident or illness. A more common cause of this in teens is brain injury.

Why Is Language Important for Teenagers?

Language is a skill needed for learning in school, getting along with others, and getting and keeping jobs. Good language skills are needed to learn math, history, and science, and to read harder textbooks.

Language disorders can lead to higher dropout rates. They can also lower a teen’s self-esteem. Teenagers know when they are having problems and may not feel good about themselves.

What if My Teenager Speaks More Than One Language?

If your teenager is bilingual or is learning to speak a second language, such as Spanish, French, or Russian, you should know that:

- A child does not get a language disorder from learning a second language. For a child to have a language disorder, he must have problems in both languages.
- Children who have language disorders can learn a second language. It will just take time.
- If you have concerns about your school’s requirement that your child learn a foreign language, contact your child’s teacher.

Is There Help for My Teenager?

Yes. Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, work with people of all ages who have language problems. SLPs work in schools, hospitals, and clinics, and can even come to your home.



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How Can an SLP Help a Teenager With a Language Disorder?

Your teen's SLP will:

- Work closely with the school team to test your child's understanding and use of language, hearing, thinking, emotional, and social skills
- Use tests and other information to find out if your teenager has a language problem or other problems that may be causing his problems in school
- Work with your child to develop new skills to problem solve, understand and use language, and do better in school, at home, and in the community

“The SLP tested Brian and observed him in the classroom. She worked with him on listening, following directions, and organizing his notebook. She talked to the teachers about helping him write down his homework assignments. She asked teachers to give him a buddy to help when he missed something in class. Soon Brian was talking more and was getting along better with the other students in school. He even helped to organize the school art show.” —Liza and Ray

Language problems can change your teen's life. Help is available.

To learn more about language and teenagers or to find an SLP near you who has been certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), visit www.asha.org or call 800-638-8255 or (TTY) 301-296-5650.

My SLP's name is

Appointment

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