Expressive Language

Is your child trying to talk but the words aren't coming out right?

Is your child:

- Saying, "I don't know," "I don't remember" or "I can't say it!"
- Having a hard time explaining what he wants to say?
- Struggling to express his thoughts in full sentences that make sense?
- Demonstrating challenges with verb tense, grammar, or pronouns?
- Finding it difficult to come up with words or describe things?
- Forgetting words?
- Not speaking until age two or three?
- Getting frustrated, having lots of ideas that she just can't get out?

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

Some children have trouble saying what they want to say. Expressive language problems can be common in children. If verbal expression is an issue, your child may frequently say, "I don't know" or "I don't remember" when trying to express his or her thoughts. It may be that your child understands what you are asking but cannot come

up with an appropriate response. Your child may have a hard time identifying the appropriate vocabulary to create long and complex sentences. He may have trouble describing exactly what he wants to say.

Your child may struggle with remembering words. He may not use verb tenses, such as past, present, and future, appropriately. Due to problems with verb tense, he may have difficulty writing stories and describing an event that happened.

For example, he may say, "I am going fishing" when he means that he went fishing yesterday. If talking about an event that may happen this upcoming weekend, he may use the past tense. The listener may need to clarify if the event has already happened or will happen. The child may not be able to use the correct words and may get frustrated. Sometimes, children with an expressive language disorder use words incorrectly because they don't understand what they mean. Some children use pronouns incorrectly when referring to others in a conversation or in writing.

A child may be very conscious of his or her language difficulties and may even be hesitant to make new friends or to engage in social activities due to the difficulty with communication skills. She may limit conversation with others or may cry easily when constantly misunderstood. Some children with these challenges use a sibling to communicate their ideas. Sometimes, it might appear that a child doesn't care about something, but in reality he or she is just intimidated by the language required to participate.

CLINICAL DESCRIPTION

Expressive language is essentially the ability to say what you want to say. As the name implies, it is the ability to 'express' oneself. This term can be defined as,

"Expressive language is the ability to use words and sentences to express thoughts and ideas" [2].

Children who have trouble with these skills may struggle to come up with the correct vocabulary words to express their thoughts or feelings. He may use words incorrectly, saying 'childs' for children or 'gooses' for geese. She may say things in a jumbled up order, and then the sentence is confusing. She may say "me want a cookie, when she means, "I want a cookie." The child may have trouble writing because it is difficult to put together and to explain thoughts in a sensible manner.

An expressive developmental language disorder is present when a child demonstrates difficulty expressing oneself verbally and in written language. It is characterized by a limited or decreased vocabulary for the child's age, difficulty utilizing pronouns appropriately, and trouble with the following: verb forms, plurals, and the rules or content of language. Expressive language disorder can be mixed with receptive language disorder, which also affects the ability to comprehend. A child may struggle to

put his thoughts into words or on paper due to a limited age-appropriate vocabulary. Because she has a hard time sequencing thoughts into words or sentences that make sense, a regular flow of ideas verbally or in written form would not be observed. A child may appear to be shy or to not speak much because it is difficult to get his or her ideas out clearly. If the child has time pressure to answer a question or to complete a written task, performance may be affected, and the quality of work may be impacted due to the time it may take to think of the words to use or the appropriate form. Drawing pictures may be easier than using words to express ideas, and a child may prefer hands-on activities, compared to tasks that involve speaking or writing.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS STRUGGLING TO COMMUNICATE

If you suspect your child is having trouble with expressive language, talk with your pediatrician for a referral to see a speech language pathologist.

If your child is in school, talk to your child's teacher about meeting with the school speech language pathologist, who can determine if an evaluation is necessary. The school special education team, which would include a learning specialist and psychologist, could also determine if any further testing may be necessary to rule out other possible disabilities.

Expressive language disorder can affect all academic areas. Speaking in class, written language tasks, and social communication can be impacted. Your child may not choose to socialize much with other children his age because it may be difficult to communicate ideas easily, and he may prefer to play alone or with family who understands him easily. If your child is experiencing these challenges at school, consult with the teacher early and often.

SIMILAR SYMPTOMS

If your child is struggling with a similar problem, not directly addressed in this section, see the list below for links to information about other related symptom areas.

- Receptive language: it may be that deficits in language comprehension are impacting communication skills in general
- Socializing: it may be that social skills are impaired due to difficulty with language skills
- Achievement: it may be that deficits in language skills impact schoolwork or grades in terms of completing homework tasks, projects, and tests
- Behaving: it may be that deficits in language skills lead to tantrums or acting out
- Executive functioning (Organizing): it may be that deficits in language skills are related to problems with planning out what to say and with controlling impulses
- Auditory processing: it may be that language deficits occur due to problems with processing auditory information

POTENTIAL DISABILITIES

*Children who have significant problems in this area **may** have any of the following potential disabilities.*Note, this information does **not** serve as a diagnosis in any way. See the 'Where to Go for Help' section for professionals who can diagnose or provide a referral.*

- Language Disorder (Expressive, Receptive or Mixed): children who have trouble expressing themselves may have a language disorder
- Autism Spectrum Disorder: children with autism often have difficulty with expressive language
- Intellectual Disability: children with limited intellectual ability may have trouble with expressive language
- Learning Disability in Reading - Dyslexia (Educationally Identified Disabilities- may be diagnosed clinically as well): children with language problems may have trouble with reading fluency, accuracy, or comprehension
- Learning Disability in Writing - Dysgraphia (Educationally Identified Disabilities- may be diagnosed clinically as well): children with expressive language issues may also have problems with writing in terms of   spelling, grammar, and organization
- Down Syndrome or other genetic condition

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

If your child is struggling with this symptom to the point that it is getting in the way of his learning, relationships, or happiness, the following professionals could help; they may offer diagnosis, treatment, or both.

- CLEAR Child Psychology: to obtain a *customized profile* of concerns for your child or to *consult 'live'* with a psychologist or speech therapist
- Speech Language Pathologists: to provide therapy in expressive language and communication skills
- Special Education Teacher: to help with reading and writing that may be impacted by expressive language
- Psychologist: to help with any emotional or social challenges associated with the expressive language problem
- Pediatrician: to provide a referral for therapy or diagnose any related medical conditions
- Geneticist: to conduct an evaluation of genetic issues are suspected

These professionals may recommend the following tests for this symptom:

- Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT): test of vocabulary

- Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF): test of receptive, expressive, core language, and pragmatic skills
- CELF Preschool: test of language skills for preschool children
- For autism consideration: Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS): test for the social skills associated with autism
- IQ test & Vineland-III: tests of intelligence and adaptive skills in consideration of intellectual disabilities
- Children's Hospital genetic testing: to test for disabilities that may be due to a genetic condition
- Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test (EOVPT-4): to test expressive vocabulary
- Expressive Vocabulary Test, Second Edition (EVT-2): to test expressive vocabulary
- Expressive Language Test: test of expressive language skills
- Test of Early Language Development (TELD): test of language in young children

LEARN MORE

[1] Speech Language Milestones: http://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/chart.htm

[2] Lewis, PhD, Jeanne, Calvery, Ph.D., Margaret, & Lewis, Ph.D., Hal (2002). *Brainstars. Brain Injury: Strategies for Teams and Re-education for Students*. US Department of Education: Office of Special Programs.

[3] Apel, Kenn & Masterson, Julie (2012). *Beyond Baby Talk: From Speaking to Spelling: A Guide to Language and Literacy Development for Parents and Caregivers.*

Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/Beyond-Baby-Talk-Development-Caregivers/dp/0307952282/

[4] Bernstein, Deena K. & Tiegermann-Farber, Ellenmorris (2017). *Language and Communication Disorders in Children, Third-Sixth Editions*.

Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/Language-Communication-Disorders-Children-6th/dp/0205584616/

[5] American Speech-Language Hearing Association. http://www.asha.org/

[6] Law, James; Garrett, Zoe & Nye, Chad. (2003). *Speech and language therapy interventions for children with primary speech and language delay or disorder*.

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