

Resources for Working with Youth with Special Needs

Speech/Language Disorders

Speech and language disorders refer to problems in communication and related areas. They can range from simple sound substitutions to the inability to understand or use language. Some causes would be hearing loss, neurological disorders, brain injury, mental retardation, drug abuse, cleft lip or palate, and vocal abuse or misuse. Frequently, the cause is unknown. It is estimated that one of every ten persons in the United States is affected by a communication disorder.

Characteristics

Speech disorders refer to difficulties in producing speech sounds or problems with voice quality. Disorders would include

- Stuttering (dysfluency) -- an interruption in the flow or rhythm of speech.
- Articulation or phonological -- problems with the way sounds are formed.
- Other -- difficulties with pitch, volume, or quality of voice.

People with speech disorders have trouble using some speech sounds. They may say "see" when they mean "ski" or have trouble with sounds like "I" or "R."

A language disorder is an impairment in the ability to understand and/or use words in context. Characteristics include the improper use of words and their meanings, the inability to express ideas, inappropriate grammatical patterns, reduced vocabulary, and the inability to follow directions.

Some youth with speech and language disorders isolate themselves from social interaction and have a problem forming interpersonal relationships.

Help For Leaders

- Ask the child and his or her parents for information on how you can help the child.
- Maintain eye contact with the youth.
- Small-group activities can help promote positive interpersonal relationships. Group acceptance can help youth with speech and language disorders improve their speech patterns.
- Do not try to finish thoughts for a child who is having difficulty talking.
- The youth may find speech or demonstration in front of the entire group very difficult. He or she may feel more comfortable sitting down with the leader and discussing the topic.

References

Sarkees-Wircenski, M., and Scott, J. L. (1995). *Vocational special needs*. Homewood, IL: American Technical Publishers, Inc.

National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities. (1991). *General information about speech and language disorders* (Fact Sheet Number 11). Washington, DC.

Resources

American Cleft Palate-Craniofacial Association
104 S. Estes Drive, Suite 204
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
(919) 933-9044

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)
10801 Rockville Pike
Rockville, MD 20852
(800) 638-8255
<http://www.asha.org/>

National Easter Seal Society
230 W. Monroe St., Suite 1800
Chicago, IL 60606-4802
(312) 726-4258 (TDD)
(800) 221-6827

National Stuttering Project
5100 E. La Palma Ave., Suite 208
Anaheim Hills, CA 92807
1-800-364-1677
<http://www.nspstutter.org/>

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