

F School Years Language and the Adolescent

The ability to read and write is strongly influenced by the ability to understand and use language. Students who are good listeners and speakers tend to become strong readers and writers. Language plays a major role in all subjects including reading, math, history, geography and even art. The early school years emphasize language development, social-emotional growth and readiness skills. The intermediate grades emphasize gaining knowledge in specific subject areas and considerable emphasis is placed on written language skills, while competency in oral (spoken) language skills is assumed. By the time students enter secondary school, students are expected to use more complex language including advanced and specialized vocabulary, more complex sentence structure, and different types of formal language for different situations.

The importance of early identification and remediation of language delays or disorders in young children is well known. Less commonly known is the importance of identifying and remediating language disorders in the adolescent. Such disorders may lead to feelings of failure, low self-esteem, poor academic and social success, and a high drop-out rate.

Characteristics of Adolescent Language Disorder

- **Failure to understand** or pay attention to rules of conversation, for example, turn taking, introducing topics of conversation, and staying on topic.
- **Difficulty using different language** for different needs of the listener or situation.
- **Incorrect use of grammar.**
- **Poor or limited vocabulary.**
- **Difficulty requesting further** information to aid understanding.
- **Tendency to ask questions** that are too general (“Are you going out tonight?” when what is really meant is “Where are you going tonight?”)
- **Tendency to agree** rather than voice opposition.
- **Use of indirect requests** and ambiguous statements.
- **“Class clown” behaviour.**
- **Extreme forgetfulness.**

- **Withdrawal** or exclusion from group activities.

- **Difficulty with:**
 - understanding non-verbal behaviours, such as body language
 - finding words
 - puns, idioms, riddles, jokes, sarcasm and slang
 - instructions, especially those that are long or grammatically complex
 - words with multiple meanings (bear versus bare)
 - sequencing
 - expressing thoughts
 - organizing information.

Source: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA).

If you are concerned about your adolescent's language skills, contact the Head of Special Education in your child's secondary school to find out what supports and services may be available.