

THE LINK BETWEEN COMMUNICATION AND BEHAVIOUR

STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT.....

Young students with delayed language development were **four times** more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviours than students with typical language development (Hart & Risley, 1995).

Late talking toddlers were **17 times** more likely to be depressed, withdrawn or limited in social relatedness than their normal talking peers (Irwin et al 2002).

*Students with behavioural problems were **ten times** more likely than other students to have language disorders (CASLPA, 2005b).*

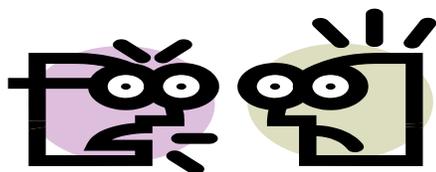
55% to 83% of students placed in residential treatment facilities for intervention of their behavioural problems were found to have pragmatic language problems (Griffith et al, 1997).

Approximately **52%** of students with language impairment were identified with reading problems (Tomblin et al, 2000). This may aggravate their behavioural disturbance.

COMMUNICATION DISORDERS IN SCHOOL-AGE STUDENTS:

Language serves the functions of intrapersonal emotional/behavioural regulation. Additionally, it mediates executive functioning and metacognitive processing.

Students with communication difficulties are often found to have learning disabilities, behavioural difficulties and/or emotional problems. As a result, they may develop **internalizing** or **externalizing** behaviour problems.



WHAT BEHAVIOURS DO YOU NOTICE IN YOUR CLASS?

Disruptive behaviours (e.g., grabbing objects, throwing items, disturbing classmates, calling out, acting as 'class clown', making noises, etc.).

Distracted behaviours during lessons (e.g., focused on shoelaces/ bits of paper/ noises in the hall, talks to peers and disrupts others).

Incomplete work (e.g., refuses to do assignments, scribbles on note books, rips up work or acts out when tasks assigned, stares into space, works only 1:1).

Limited Participation in group.

Responds in a silly, off topic, or **inappropriate manner** or does not respond at all.

Poor interaction with peers/ adults.

Poor turn-taking, won't share, **can't play co-operatively**/ can't work as part of a group.

Frequently get into **arguments** / physical fights.

Frequently complains about other student bullying them/ not being friends with them.

May be **rude** to peers or adults.

Proficient communication skills are essential for the development of life skills and academic success.

They are required for listening, speaking, reading, writing, thinking, learning, problem solving as well as social development and peer relationships.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE UNDERLYING COMMUNICATION CAUSES?

Receptive/Expressive Language Difficulties

The student may have **hearing difficulties**.

The student may not understand the **task expectations** if the language used is too complex.

The student may not have the language skills to understand or express the response: **limitations in vocabulary and/or grammar**.

The student may have difficulty **formulating and sequencing** relevant information orally and in writing.

The student may have **word retrieval difficulties**. He may have said the word in the past, but can't 'find' it now.

Social Communication Difficulties

The student may have difficulty understanding abstract language (e.g., jokes, inferences, sarcasm, etc). He may **misinterpret information** and easily take offence.

The student may have difficulties understanding **social rules** (e.g., how to share, take turns, request, etc.) and **conversational rules** (e.g., allowing others to talk, responding to comments and questions, not perseverating on a topic).

The student may experience difficulty understanding **'hidden' classroom rules** (ie. raising a hand before responding / staying with the group and not walking away when bored etc.).

The student may not have the oral language skills to **negotiate confrontations** with peers.

IF YOU THINK POOR COMMUNICATION IS CONTRIBUTING TO BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS....

- Explore early history with parents
- Ensure good hearing
- Simplify and shorten your language and instruction
- Teach replacement skills, choice making and emotional regulation explicitly
- Use modeling, role play and priming to help facilitate desirable behaviours
- Identify the (covert and overt) trigger(s) for one target behaviour
- Adopt a proactive, visual, concrete approach (e.g., social script, contingency map)
- Be consistent but positive by praising efforts and attempts and by building on strengths and interest
- Program to provide successful learning experiences
- Collect your observations and present to the school support team for interdisciplinary suggestions
- Consider a speech-language pathology assessment to develop an understanding of students' communication abilities and for specific strategies

IN SUMMARY...

Always consider the possibility of underlying language deficits related to behaviour problems. Behavioural issues caused by communication difficulties can result in a range of behaviours such as depression or aggression.

CASE STUDY #1:

Internalizing behaviours refer to problems that affect a student's internal world, such as withdrawal, social isolation, low self-esteem, anxiety, low initiation and poor engagement.

Paula is in grade one in Ms. Hamed's class. Ms. Hamed has noticed that Paula participates very little in class discussions, has formed no real friendships with her classmates, and generally appears sad or worried. Ms. Hamed has noticed that Paula seems hesitant to speak with her. She is worried that Paula's behaviour in class indicates an emotional issue. Ms. Hamed spoke to Paula's kindergarten teacher, who reported that Paula came into JK with poor language skills, and missed quite a bit of school with frequent ear infections and colds. While she started out school as a cheerful and eager learner, she became more reserved as the demands of the classroom increased. Paula's kindergarten teacher also reported that she was assessed by the speech language pathologist at the end of Junior Kindergarten. The reports indicated that Paula had a language delay.

First Steps:

Investigate background history (previous academics, past involvement with speech-language pathologist, attendance, hearing and vision status, etc.).

In addition to behaviour strategies, you may want to consider the following:

- Consult with the SLP who conducted the assessment about how the child's needs may impact success in the classroom.
- Familiarize yourself with the student's communication strengths and needs.
- Use the child's strengths to support learning.
- Facilitate play with Paula's classroom peers.

Since the SLP's findings indicated that Paula struggled to understand language in the classroom, the following may be helpful:

- Modify the presentation of instructions in class by simplifying and rephrasing.
- Have Paula repeat the instructions to assess for comprehension.
- Incorporate visuals when explaining new concepts to give information in different forms.

CASE STUDY #2:

Externalizing behaviours refer to students acting negatively, and may entail aggression, verbal abuse, temper tantrum, pushing, hitting, running away, screaming, throwing things, hyperactivity, or disruptive behaviours.

Brian is a gr. 6 student in Mr. Kim's class who has been frequently acting out during class time. While Mr. Kim is speaking, Brian will look around the room and annoy other students by talking to them or poking at their backs. Difficulty with peer interaction is an area of concern. He has been observed to yell and shove other students while attempting to communicate rules during a game and has been in frequent conflicts during group activities in class. His aggressive behaviors are intensifying as the oral language demands of the curriculum increase and as his classmates mature socially.

First Steps:

Investigate background history (previous academics, attendance, hearing and vision status, etc.), and consider discussion at team.

In addition to behaviour strategies, you may want to consider the following:

To support Brian's understanding during classroom lessons:

- Incorporate visuals and/or gestures to support vocabulary items and actions.
- Preview new vocabulary items at the beginning of new units.
- Be aware of the rate of presentation and simplify language.

To address expressive difficulties in the school-yard:

- Mediate the situation with simple, concrete language when the student is calm. It is often helpful for the student and teacher to create a plan that outlines how to relax when anger or anxiety arises.
- Offer multiple choice options or the opportunity to listen to classmates responses to help support verbal responses.
- Clarify Brian's verbal responses by paraphrasing what he has said and then ask for verification.

To support expressive language and peer interactions:

- Teach communication skills explicitly by using role-play, negotiation, and reviewing social rules.

References

Please contact the Speech-Language Pathology Department