

Expressive Language Disorder



Expressive language refers to the use of spoken language. A student with an expressive language disorder is unable to communicate thoughts, needs or wants at the same level or with the same complexity as his or her same-aged peers. Students with an expressive language disorder may understand most language but are unable to use this language in sentences. Difficulties with the pronunciation of words may or may not be present. Expressive language disorders are a broad category and often overlap with other disabilities or conditions.

Characteristics of an expressive language disorder may include word-finding difficulties, limited vocabulary, overuse of non-specific words like “thing” or “stuff,” over reliance on stock phrases, and difficulty “coming to the point” of what they are trying to say.

Implications for Planning and Awareness

- Meet with the student and parents early in the school year to discuss how the school can support the student’s needs. This could include finding out about:
 - the student’s strengths, interests and areas of need
 - successful communication strategies used at home or in the community that could also be used at school.
- Learn as much as you can about how expressive language affects learning and social and emotional well-being. Reading, asking questions and talking to a qualified speech-language pathologist will build your understanding and help you make decisions on how to support the student’s success in the classroom.
- Review any specialized assessments available, including the most recent speech-language report and the recommendations listed.
- Develop a system for sharing information with relevant staff members about the student’s language skills and successful communication strategies. Talk with the previous teacher regarding the student’s language use and strategies used to support the student in the classroom.
- Collaborate with the school and/or jurisdictional team to identify and coordinate any needed consultation, supports such as speech therapy, or augmentative communication and assessments.

Your awareness needs to begin with conversations with the student’s parents.

Implications for Instruction

- Repeat back what the student has said, *modelling* the correct pronunciation, word form or sentence structure. It is unnecessary to ask the student to repeat the correct form after you; what is important is that the student *hears* the correct form.



- Provide the student with choices of correct grammar, sentence structure or word choice to help them process the correct form or word to use. For example: “Is it a giraffe or an elephant?”, “If it’s a boy, is it he or she?”
- Be patient when the student is speaking; not rushing a student who has expressive language difficulties will reduce frustration levels.
- Use visuals to support expressive language skills. Pictures or written cues can be used to prompt the student to use a longer utterance or initiate a phrase within a specific situation or activity.
- Help build the student’s vocabulary by creating opportunities for focusing on language processing skills, such as sorting and grouping, similarities and differences.
- Help students connect new words and information to pre-existing knowledge.
- Use pre-planning strategies for oral and written tasks. Talk out the student’s story or ideas first. Then help the student organize thoughts by creating a task outline. Write out the ideas the student wants to discuss in his or her story. Cue the student to look at the “outline,” to verbalize what he or she wants to say, and then to write it down.
- Use visuals, symbols or photos to help students organize and communicate their thoughts.
- To facilitate students’ speech intelligibility and expressive language skills, encourage them to slow down while speaking and face their communication partner.
- Provide descriptive feedback for students when the message is not understood. For example: “You were talking too fast, I didn’t understand where you said you were going after school.” This will also improve the students self-monitoring skills.

Implications for Social and Emotional Well-being

- Engage the student and parents in planning for transitions between grade levels, different schools and out of school.
- The student may have difficulty with social and conversational skills. Teach the language to use in specific social communication situations, such as:
 - greeting people and starting a conversation
 - asking and answering questions
 - asking for help or clarification.
- Explicitly teach social communication skills, such as how to read body language and expressions. Use direct instruction along with modelling, storytelling and role-play.
- Provide support in transitioning from one activity or place to another. Cues, routines and purposeful activity during transitions may be helpful so that the student clearly understands what to do.

Parents know their children well and can offer insights on how to support their social and emotional well-being. There is strength in collaborating on strategies that could be used at home, at school and in the community.



As you consider the implications for this disability, think about the following questions:

1. Do I need further conversations with the parents to better understand this student's strengths and needs? Yes No
2. Do I need targeted professional learning? Yes No
If yes, what specific topics and strategies would I explore?
3. Is consultation with jurisdictional staff required? Yes No
If yes, what issues and questions would we explore?
4. Is consultation with external service providers required (e.g., Regional Educational Consulting Services, Student Health Partnership, Alberta Children's Hospital, Glenrose Hospital)? Yes No
If yes, what issues and questions would we explore?
5. Are further assessments required to assist with planning for this student? Yes No
If yes, what questions do I need answered?
6. Is service to the student from an external provider required? Yes No
If yes, what outcomes would be anticipated?

Links for further information:

Government of Alberta. Creating language-rich environments.
<https://www.alberta.ca/creating-language-rich-environments.aspx>
Resources for improving Language, Literacy and Communication
<http://www.speechtx.com>
Speech-language Resources <http://www.speechlanguage-resources.com>

Please note:

These websites are for information only and the user is responsible for evaluating the content and appropriate uses of the information.

