

Receptive Language Disorder



Receptive language is the comprehension of spoken language. Students with a receptive language disorder have difficulty understanding and processing what is said to them. Receptive language includes understanding figurative language, as well as literal language. Characteristics of a receptive language disorder may include not appearing to listen, difficulty following verbal directions, limited vocabulary, difficulty understanding complex sentences or responding appropriately to questions, parroting words or phrases, and demonstrating lack of interest when storybooks are read to them. Receptive language disorders are a broad category that can range from mild to severe and often overlap with other conditions and/or disabilities.

Implications for Planning and Awareness

- Meet with the student and parents early in the school year to discuss how the school can best support the student’s language 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 receptive language disorder may affect learning and social and emotional well-being. Reading, asking questions and talking to a speech-language pathologist will build your understanding and help you make decisions to support the student’s success at school.
- Review available specialized assessments, including the most current speech-language report and the recommendations listed.
- Talk with the previous teacher regarding the student’s language use and communication strategies that were successful in supporting the student in the classroom.
- Collaborate with the school and/or jurisdictional team to identify and coordinate any needed assessments, consultation and supports related to speech and communication.
- Develop a system for sharing information with relevant staff members about the student’s language skills and successful communication strategies.

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

Implications for Instruction

- Reduce auditory and visual distractions in the classroom. Extraneous noises and visual clutter interfere with the student’s ability to listen, follow directions and know what information to attend to.
- Prepare students so they know when it is time to listen. Cue them (e.g., call their name, give a verbal cue) and encourage them to look at you. You can also give students a nonverbal signal, such as pointing to your ear.



- Keep directions short and simple.
- Include visuals (e.g., photos, illustrations, symbols) when giving instructions. Visuals provide additional information to the student, assist with memory and processing; visuals remain when the auditory information is gone.
- Use natural gestures to give students added cues about what you want them to do.
- Speak clearly and slowly. A slower speaking rate with pauses between ideas will help students understand what you want them to do. Emphasize important parts of directions.
- Break tasks and assignments into short, easy-to-manage steps. Write down these steps on the board or students' desks so they can use them as a reference.
- Check the students' comprehension of directions and information (e.g., retelling instructions in their own words, indicating understanding with different coloured cups, re-sequencing instructions on the white board, using manipulatives to demonstrate comprehension).

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 situations, such as:
 - greeting people and starting a conversation
 - asking and answering questions
 - asking for help or clarification.
- Explicitly teach social skills related to communication, such as how to read body language and expressions. Use direct instruction along with modelling, storytelling, role-play and social scripts.
- Provide supports and set up the environment for success in social situations, such as:
 - using a buddy system for recess, lunch and other unstructured social times
 - providing organized activities for the student to take part in at recess or lunchtime.
- Provide support in transitioning from one classroom activity or place to another. Cues, routines and visual reminders may be helpful so that the student understands what needs to be done during specific transitions.

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:

Talk Box. <http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/talk-box-how-to-use-the-talk-box.pdf>

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.

