

Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

Speech Sound Disorders and Literacy

A speech sound disorder (SSD) refers to difficulties producing sounds, such as a lisp. However, a speech sound disorder can also impact how a child perceives a sound or their understanding of the unspoken rules that govern when and where certain sounds are produced. This can have negative consequences on literacy.

If a child is not perceiving a sound correctly, they could consequently have trouble decoding the sound while reading or using the correct letter for spelling.¹ For example, a child struggling to hear the difference between a /t/ and a /k/ might spell “tup” for “cup”. Even if a child with an SSD is saying the sound correctly, they still can be perceiving the sound incorrectly.²

Researchers have found that 25% of children receiving treatment for an SSD also have a reading disability.⁴ Fifty percent of children with an SSD and/or spoken language disorder also presented with a literacy disorder.¹ In another study, preschoolers with low intelligibility (the ability for speech to be understood by others) were more likely to have problems with literacy in elementary school.³

Hearing impairments weaken the ability to perceive all types of sounds, including speech sounds called phonemes. Altered perception of phonemes can impact reading, writing, and how speech sounds are produced. Although hearing impairments seem rare, researchers in one study found that 54% of children diagnosed with a reading disorder failed a hearing screening.⁵

Resources:

1. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). Written Language Disorders. (Practice Portal). Retrieved March 30, 2022, from www.asha.org/Practice-Portal/Clinical-Topics/Written-Language-Disorders/.
2. Brosseau-Lapré, F., Schumacher, J., & Kluender, K.R. (2020). Perception of medial consonants by preschoolers with and without speech sound disorders. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*. https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_JSLHR-20-00146
3. Jin, F., Schjølberg, S., Eadie, P., Nes, R.B., & Røysamb, E. (2020). Preschool speech intelligibility and 8-year literacy: a moderated mediation analysis. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*. https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_jslhr-19-00394
4. Tambyraja, S.R., Farquharson, K., & Justice, L. (2020). Reading risk in children with speech sound disorder: prevalence, persistence, and predictors. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*. https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_JSLHR-20-00108
5. Werfel, K.L., Peek, L., Reynolds, G., & Bassard, S. (2020). Hearing screening failure among students with reading impairment: rate and relation to specific reading deficits. *Perspectives of the ASHA Special Interest Groups*. https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_PERSP-19-00163



Here is what you can do for young children and children with an SSD:



- Early identification of SSDs is key. If a student has low intelligibility in preschool, consult a speech-language pathologist for a possible screening or evaluation.



- Conduct regular hearing screenings.
- If a child is referred to a child study team for a possible SSD, probe and consider evaluating literacy skills.



- Monitor diagnosed SSD students for reading and writing problems.
- When appropriate, work on phoneme perception tasks with SSD students. This could not only have positive outcomes for sound production but reading and spelling as well.



- Use an FM system when recommended by an audiologist.



- Collaborate with parents, teachers, speech-language pathologists, reading specialists, and other professionals.
- Always read, read, and read some more to children.

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