

Speech-Language Impairments

Limitations in speech and language may result from a number of different impairments and disorders. An individual may be limited due to problems with articulation, voice strength, language expression, or may be non-vocal. Some causes of speech and language disorders include hearing loss, neurological disorders, stroke, cerebral palsy, oral and laryngeal cancer, dementia, chronic laryngitis, brain injury, intellectual disability, drug abuse, physical impairments such as cleft lip or palate, and vocal abuse or misuse. Frequently, however, the cause is unknown. Following is a list of speech and language disorders:

- **Aphasia** – impaired expression or comprehension of written or spoken language. Aphasia is often caused by stroke, brain injury, or Alzheimer’s dementia.
- **Dysarthria** – results in difficulty pronouncing words like “cat” or sounds like “sh” and “ba.” Dysarthria may be caused by a degenerative neurological disorder or alcohol intoxication.
- **Dysphonias** – can be present in one of two forms: adductor (produces a strained or strangled voice quality) or abductor (sounds like chronic hoarseness or breathy and effortful speech).
- **Esophageal speech** – technique whereby a person takes air in through the mouth, traps it in the throat, and then releases it. As air is released, it makes the upper parts of the throat/esophagus vibrate and produces sound which is still shaped into words with the lips, tongue, teeth, and other mouth parts.
- **Stuttering** – results in repetition, blocks or inability to say certain words, and/or the prolonging of words. An individual may also have distorted movements and facial expressions when trying to speak.
- **Nodules** – most frequently caused by vocal abuse or misuse. Polyps may be caused by prolonged vocal abuse, but may also occur after a single, traumatic event to the vocal folds. Speech may be hoarse, breathy, and painful to produce.

The following is a quick overview of some job accommodations:

Communicating with the Person with the Speech or Language impairment:

- Be patient, do not complete words or phrases for the individual
- Concentrate on the content of the conversation not the delivery
- Communicate as naturally as possible

Communicating One-on-One or in Groups:

- Provide pen and paper, chalk or dry-erase boards
- Allow the use of a computer with word processing software, word prediction software, and/or speech output software
- Provide a portable speech amplifier
- Provide, or allow the use of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices
- Provide a TTY (can be useful to communicate one-on-one through a TTY trainer device that connects TTYs together without a telephone line)
- Allow the use of e-mail or instant messaging

Communicating on the Telephone:

- Provide telephone equipment that offers outgoing speech amplification
- Allow the use of AAC devices, or speech amplifiers with the telephone

- Provide a TTY
- Allow the use of Speech-to-Speech (SRS) relay services

Did you know...many of today's hottest technologies were first developed for people with disabilities? Take text messaging. Long used by the deaf community, it's an increasingly popular communication tool for everyone. Similarly, the technology used to improve wheelchairs now powers people on Segways® up and down city streets.