

Language and Literacy – The Older Child

Reading, writing and spelling are language-based skills that benefit from strong oral language abilities. A strong oral language base includes:

Awareness, understanding and use of the

- **phonological system** of the language (letters represent sounds, words are made of sounds in a certain order).
- **syntactic system** of the language (the rules for how we make sentences such as word order and grammar).
- **semantic system** of the language (word meanings and how words go together because of similar meanings).
- **pragmatic** system of the language (the rules for how we talk with others such as politeness and turn-taking)

Older children with reading and writing difficulties may have quite normal sounding speech, although this may not have been true when they were younger. Their language problems are more likely to show up in their writing or in their understanding of spoken information. Some of these students may have a Language Based Learning Disability (LLD).

How can you help?

- Read over the materials the teacher has provided *with* your child. Help her identify words she doesn't know. Practice pronouncing, spelling and writing words that are difficult to say. Help her understand complicated sentences.
- Model language learning strategies by using new vocabulary in everyday situations. You could help the student create a dictionary of "new" or "interesting" words and practice using them in sentences. Help your child practice oral presentations.
- Teach and practice the use of "pictures in the mind" (visualizing strategies) to improve your child's ability to understand what they read. If your child likes to draw, have them draw a picture of what they have read. Talk about the picture with them.

- Talk about talking and writing. For instance you can explain why it may be more interesting to a reader if more detail is added to a written sentence. You can talk about why a story makes more sense when it has a beginning, middle and an ending. You can help your child understand that if he uses a pronoun, it needs to be clear to whom that pronoun is referring. Parents should work with teachers and the SLP who can tell them exactly what part of language they can work on at home.

Children who are falling behind other children their age in literacy skills may become discouraged. It is important that they feel supported and are encouraged to use a variety of ways in which to get information (e.g. the internet, programs like Kurzweil). Teachers will sometimes let them express themselves in ways other than writing (e.g. oral presentations, group projects).

Talk to your child's teacher or her SLP to learn more about specific strengths and weaknesses they observe in your child's language and literacy skills so you can provide the most appropriate support at home.

References

Paul, Rhea Language Disorders from Infancy through Adolescence – 3rd Edition, Moseby Elsevier Pub., 2007

