

The Effect of Language Delays on Reading and Writing Skills: FAQs

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Is there a relationship between language delays and reading/writing skills?

Ask any classroom teacher or special educator (SE) and he/she will tell you that children with language delays are much more likely to experience difficulties in the classroom, particularly in the areas of reading and writing. According to research, 73% of all second-grade students who are identified as poor readers have difficulties with phonemic awareness or spoken language in kindergarten (Catts, 1999). As a result, Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) are becoming increasingly more involved in the remediation of reading and writing skills in children diagnosed with a language disorder.

What type of difficulties will a child with language delays have?

A child with a language delay may have difficulties in the classroom with:

- understanding oral directions.
- vocabulary skills.
- using complete sentences or correct grammar.
- completing assignments independently.
- becoming easily frustrated.

How can a child's reading and writing skills be affected by a language delay?

A child's reading and writing skills can be affected by a language delay in many different ways. He/she may experience problems with:



- learning the relationship between letters and sounds.
- discriminating between sounds.
- learning sight words.
- “guessing” at words based on pictures or the beginning sound.
- spelling.
- fluent oral reading (not sounding “choppy”).
- forming letters and words on paper.
- organizing thoughts on paper.
- reading comprehension.

As a parent, what should I do if I suspect that my child might have a language delay and/or problems with reading and writing?

First of all, discuss your concerns with your child's classroom teacher/SE. It may be possible that some changes could be made in the classroom that will help your child be more successful. If your child has not had a speech and language evaluation, request that an evaluation be done by the SLP at school. Be sure to tell the SLP about the difficulties you have observed in your child.

What can I do to help?

If your child is diagnosed with a language delay, be sure you understand his/her areas of weakness and the goals he/she is working on at school. Ask his/her SLP for activities that you can work on at home. Also, talk to the classroom teacher/SE about any problems that he/she may be having with reading or writing. Remember that good communication between the parent, classroom teacher/SE, and SLP is one of the most important things you can do to help your child.

What can I do at home to help my child?

Here are some suggestions for things you can do at home:

- Read books with your child. Make it a special and enjoyable time together. If your child sees that you enjoy reading, it's likely that he/she will see reading as fun! Also, reading books introduces your child to new vocabulary and allows him/her to hear grammatically correct sentence structures.

- Promote phonemic awareness. Provide opportunities for word play through rhyming words, songs, chants, etc. Talk about how the words rhyme, begin with the same sound, or end with the same sound. For example, the book titled *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* says “Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you see? I see a Blue Horse looking at me.” When reading, you could point out that “brown and bear” begin with the letter “b” and “see/me” are rhyming words.
- Provide new experiences. Exposing your child to new experiences provides opportunities for increasing vocabulary. For example, take your child to the zoo or for a walk in the woods and talk about things you see.
- Encourage your child. A child that is struggling academically needs a lot of positive feedback to encourage success. Use phrases like “You are really working hard, You are doing a great job, etc.”



Reference:

Catts, H.W., Fey, M.D., Zhang, X. & Tomblin, J.B. “Language basis of reading disabilities: Evidence from a longitudinal investigation,” *Scientific Studies of Reading*; 1999; 3:331-361.