

ADULTS: Language Guidelines for Referral to Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs)

Most Common Etiologies:

- Central nervous system tumors
- Stroke
- Traumatic brain injury (TBI)

Related Terms:

Acalculia, agnosia, agraphia, alexia, anomia, aphasia, apraxia of speech, emotional lability, hemiparesis, hemiplegia, homonymous hemianopsia, paraphasia, perseveration, pragmatics, visual neglect

Potential Consequences:

- Loss of ability to communicate needs
- Lack of awareness of impairment and its degree (including inability to determine whether communication is effective)
- Difficulty participating in exchange of routine information
- Isolation from family members and social contacts, with increased risk for depression

- Disruption of ability to fulfill educational or vocational roles
- Difficulty performing personal lifestyle management activities
- Risk for injury because of inability to communicate in an emergency situation and understand or follow safety precautions

Behaviors¹ That Should Trigger an SLP Referral

Receptive language

- difficulty maintaining eye contact or paying attention to speaker
- problems understanding basic spoken and written information, including simple words, questions, phrases, and commands
- difficulty understanding others' and one's own speech
- limited ability to follow or understand one-to-one conversations or complicated commands
- problems reading concrete, everyday information in short personal notes, letters, or short stories
- tendency to become confused or respond incorrectly during group conversations
- problems reading basic functional information (such as a schedule, telephone book, or instructions)
- limited comprehension of what is read in newspapers and magazines
- difficulty understanding information given over telephone

- difficulty understanding information from TV and radio
- difficulty following progression of information presented or drawing opinions and conclusions from movies or books
- denies and neglects left side of face, body, or environment (e.g., locating speakers and objects in left visual range or food on left side of plate)
- difficulty understanding humor, sarcasm, or nonverbal information in conversation (i.e., facial expressions, gestures, etc.)
- right visual field of each eye is impaired

Receptive language with declining cognition

- difficulty understanding speech and questions of others
- difficulty understanding complex sentences and/or requests
- problems paying attention to person speaking or tendency to start speaking before the speaker finishes

¹Behaviors are clustered to indicate different levels of function and/or patterns commonly associated with different medical conditions or etiologies.

Expressive language

- inability to speak or swallow because of paralysis; is awake and alert but with no communication system
- severely limited expression (i.e., does not make spontaneous movements or sounds, speaks in one-syllable words or brief sentences after significant delay, and/or speaks in monotone whisper)
- difficulty saying any words, including inappropriate pauses, repeating sounds or words, and searching or correcting to produce correct words
- noticeable frustration during speech difficulties
- difficulty shifting to writing with nonimpaired left hand (due to right hemiparesis) and difficulty with formation of letters, numbers, or words
- difficulty answering questions or using words, phrases, and/or sentences consistently; word choice is reliable, but word usage is either limited with search behaviors or fluent with word errors (e.g., “spoon” for “fork”) or similar sounds (e.g., “ko” for “go”)
- difficulty writing basic information (i.e., name, address, date of birth, telephone number, etc.)
- problems with everyday tasks such as writing phone messages and checks
- problems writing sentences; often contain errors in word usage, grammar, and perseveration, resulting in frustration
- difficulty speaking in sentences; perseverates and makes related word errors or uses words without meaning (e.g., excessive pronouns for content words, such as “I want to go with him. You know him. I want to go with him.”)
- problems with addition, subtraction, number formation, and number use
- difficulty retelling stories or describing concepts, especially in conversation

- difficulty expressing ideas clearly in personal letters or other routine correspondence, including mistakes in spacing material on page, grammar, and/or spelling
- tendency to begin reading and writing midpage due to left neglect
- difficulty conversing using appropriate nonverbal language (i.e., gestures), social pleasantries, taking turns, switching, or staying on topic
- difficulty communicating with effective timing, word choice, grammar, and content, including nonverbal behavior in highly abstract and/or highly interactive group conversation
- difficulty accurately, effectively, or verbally presenting highly technical and/or professional material

Expressive language with declining cognition

- difficulty finding appropriate words, speaking in sentences, and correcting speech mistakes
- difficulty expressing needs; perseveration

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