Signals
Social-Emotional and Mental Health Development for Children and Teens

NAMI Georgia
National Alliance on Mental Illness

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Language, Emotional Regulation and Behavior: Untangle the Triangle

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What are we talking about?

- A broad developmental age range: birth through elementary school
- A time when the quality and quantity of language provision and language acquisition is both building a foundation and when initial deficiencies begin to impact other areas of functioning
- The nature of development is neither simple nor entirely continuous as a variable.
- Some skills are solidified and functional early, while others lag and it is not always the same skills in every child...
Do we think about language as a *simple* process or one that is *highly complex*?
Human Brain Functions

Brain Lateralization

- Analytical Thought
- Detail Oriented Perception
- Ordered Sequencing
- Rational Thought
- Verbal
- Cautious
- Planning
- Math/Science
- Logic
- Right Field Vision
- Right Side Motor Skills

- Intuitive Thought
- Holistic Perception
- Random Sequencing
- Emotional Thought
- Non-Verbal
- Adventurous
- Impulse
- Creative Writing/Art
- Imagination
- Left Field Vision
- Left Side Motor Skills
Brain Areas Involved in Language

- Primary motor cortex
- Broca’s area
- Supramarginal gyrus
- Angular gyrus
- Primary auditory area
- Wernicke’s area
The Organization of the Human Brain for Language
Words and the Brain

- Reading Words (Occipital Lobe - Vision)
- Thinking about Words (Broca’s Area - Language production)
- Hearing Words (Wernicke’s Area - Language Comprehension)
- Saying Words (Motor cortex)
Speech, Language and Communication:

Speech

Expressive Language (output)
- Oral
- Written

Receptive Language (input)
- Hear and/or receive visually
- Reading and comprehending
- Understand/comprehend
Social Communication:

Involves a very complex set of interaction rules and use of language that is highly contextual and very fluid and interactive.
It is a Complicated Recipe!

Children are integrating:
- Speech
- Language
- Social communication
- Emotional regulation
- Motor skills
- Executive functioning....

Teachers need to:
- Practice patience, compassion and curiosity
- Employ guidance and coaching
It has been said that grit is one of the most valuable styles for success...

Grit may indeed involve the “x” factor in learning...how a child pulls it all together to succeed-passion and perseverance.

The role of a teacher is not just to ensure that subjects are taught and learned...but that kids know how to use that knowledge and that they can solve problems and persevere.
How do you encourage “grit” in your classroom?
What does a classroom/educational environment require?

- Age-based knowledge and opportunities
- Development-based knowledge and opportunities
- Grade-based knowledge
What does a classroom/educational environment require?

- Are expectations based on a fluctuating continuum of language abilities?
- Are expectations based on a fluctuating continuum of social emotional skills?

These are not simple...

- What are the conditions for language development to proceed?
- What are the conditions for social emotional development to proceed?
- What if one area lags and another surges?
- Are behaviors the cause or effect?
Some Warning Signs: Infant to Preschoolers

- Not learning and using language to express oneself
- Not using a variety of vocabulary words and grammar in oral interactions
- Not interested or engaged in reading
- Difficulty following one-step directions or simple two-step directions without model or visual
- Behavioral dysregulation – pushing, hitting, aggression (no words to express wants and needs)
Some Warning Signs:
Kindergarten to 5\textsuperscript{th} Grade

- Poor \textit{readers}

- Behaviors to \textit{avoid reading}

- Difficulty \textbf{following directions} that are increasingly complex and verbal in nature

- \textbf{Misinterpretation} of messages – verbal or nonverbal

- \textbf{Completing tasks} in a way less than fully completed (partial, missing details, sequentially incorrect)

- Often have development an attitude or behavior to “\textit{draw attention away}” from the language deficit (this may be to cope or may be unconscious-the child may not be aware of their “strategy”


How hard is it to succeed if language is not well developed?

Break down the task...
what does it take to be successful at everyday activities?

- Understanding the direction
- Attending to the whole message
- Remembering the steps in order
- Turning instructions into a motor plan
- Planning and organization
- Expressing a need for help
- Putting into words emotional states (frustration, confusion, anxiety),
- Maintaining emotional coping and ego when things go wrong or one of the above steps is short circuited
What’s your first impression of this child? How will this behavior affect learning?
What words would you use to describe the behavior?

Inattentive  Anxious  Lost

How does this behavior make you feel?

Impatient  Helpless  Frustrated  Annoyed
What biases do you have?
  • Gender-based
  • Age based
  • Disability based

Check yourself?

Consider an alternate explanation
What do you think is underlying cause of this child’s behavior?
What you feel is valid...

How could your attribution of the behavior affect your reaction as a teacher?
If you knew this child had a language deficit, would it change your reaction?
What do you think this child’s emotional state is?

A - F

G - M

N - S

T - Z
What words would you use to describe the behavior?

- Noncompliant
- Disrespectful
- Mischievous

How does this behavior make you feel?

- Angry
- Disrespected
- Tired
- Impatient
What biases do you have?
• Gender-based
• Age based
• Disability based

Check yourself?

Consider an alternate explanation
What you feel is valid...

Why do you feel those emotions?
What you feel is valid...

What is the attribution you give to this behavior?
What you feel is valid...

How different do you feel when you see behavior as a method of communicating?
We often apply this method of classroom management for children...

- But do we apply this to **ourselves**?
- Do we slow down our thinking to seek **positive solutions**?
If it seems like simply behavior...
What can I do?

• Give the child the **benefit of the doubt**
• Listen to the **words**
• Watch the **affect**
• Think about the **context**
• Categorically reject your **first impression** and consider **all the factors** before deciding that this issue is behavior versus something else
Help language by making expectations available in a multitude of ways...

- Visual
- Verbal Reminders
- Narration
- Simplify Words
- Sensory/Motor
- Make Problem Solving Options Available & Visible
Help language by making expectations available in a multitude of ways...

- Tone of Voice
- Length of Phrase
- Vocabulary Use
- Work with areas of interest and strength
- Slow Down Speak with Clarity
- Ask Questions and Be Curious
Use the following instructional benchmarks as a guide to how things can look for teachers for birth to 4 and K to 5...

What can go right and wrong?

These are examples...how are there overlaps from language to speaking/listening to reading to writing
STANDARD: CLL1
The child will listen to conversations and comprehend for a variety of purposes.

STANDARD: CLL2
The child will acquire vocabulary introduced in conversations, activities, stories, or books.

STANDARD: CLL3
The child will use nonverbal communication for a variety of purposes.

STANDARD: CLL4
The child will use increasingly complex spoken language for a variety of purposes.

STANDARD: CLL5
The child will acquire meaning from a variety of materials read to him/her.

STANDARD: CLL6
The child will develop early phonological awareness (awareness of the units of sound).

STANDARD: CLL7
The child will demonstrate increasing knowledge of the alphabet.

STANDARD: CLL8
The child will demonstrate awareness of print concepts.

STANDARD: CLL9
The child will use writing for a variety of purposes.
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Georgia Standards of Excellence/English Language Arts
First Grade: Speaking and Listening

Beginning of 1st Grade

- Follow agreed upon rules for classroom discussions
- Build on others’ talk in conversation by responding to the comments of others

End of 1st Grade

- Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant detail, expressing ideas and feelings clearly
- Produce complete sentences when appropriate to task (activity) and situation

*The visual and selected standards for listening and speaking highlight the increase in complexity over the course of the year.*
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**Beginning of 5th Grade**

- Speak clearly at an understandable pace
- Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, using formal English when appropriate to the task and situation

**End of 5th Grade**

- Review key ideas expressed (by others) and explain own ideas in light of the discussion
- Report on a topic or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and details to support main ideas and themes

- Produce and respond to specific questions by making comments
- Summarize points made by a speaker and explain how each claim is supported by evidence
SUMMARY

• Foundations for language are built early (birth to 24 months)
• Often issues with language emerge in subtle ways and are far downstream from the first 2 years of life
• Language and communication are complicated and multifaceted processes
• Language and communication interact with social emotional skills, emotional regulation and contextual factors often resulting in behaviors
• We all need to be good detectives and expect the best of the children we teach while having curiosity and compassion for how they are currently able to express themselves
• What we need our students to accomplish is highly integrated and complex and they are still practicing with all these skills...they need a coach.