

What Is Language? What Is Speech?

[en Español]

Kelly's 4-year-old son, Tommy, has speech and language problems. Friends and family have a hard time understanding what he is saying. He speaks softly, and his sounds are not clear.

Jane had a stroke. She can only speak in one- to two-word sentences and cannot explain what she needs and wants. She also has trouble following simple directions.

Language is different from speech.

Language is made up of socially shared rules that include the following:

- What words mean (e.g., "star" can refer to a bright object in the night sky or a celebrity)
- How to make new words (e.g., friend, friendly, unfriendly)
- How to put words together (e.g., "Peg walked to the new store" rather than "Peg walk store new")
- What word combinations are best in what situations ("Would you mind moving your foot?" could quickly change to "Get off my foot, please!" if the first request did not produce results)

Speech is the verbal means of communicating. Speech consists of the following:

Articulation

How speech sounds are made (e.g., children must learn how to produce the "r" sound in order to say "rabbit" instead of "wabbit").

Voice

Use of the vocal folds and breathing to produce sound (e.g., the voice can be abused from overuse or misuse and can lead to hoarseness or loss of voice).

Fluency

The rhythm of speech (e.g., hesitations or stuttering can affect fluency). When a person has trouble understanding others (**receptive language**), or sharing thoughts, ideas, and feelings completely (**expressive language**), then he or she has a **language disorder**.

When a person is unable to produce speech sounds correctly or fluently, or has problems with his or her voice, then he or she has a **speech disorder**.

In our example, Tommy has a **speech disorder** that makes him hard to understand. If his lips, tongue, and mouth are not moved at the right

time, then what he says will not sound right. Children who **stutter**, and people whose **voices** sound hoarse or nasal have speech problems as well.

Jane has a **receptive and expressive language disorder**. She does not have a good understanding of the meaning of words and how and when to use them. Because of this, she has trouble following directions and speaking in long sentences. Many others, including adults with **aphasia** and children with **learning disabilities**, have language problems. Language and speech disorders can exist together or by themselves. The problem can be mild or severe. In any case, a comprehensive evaluation by a **speech-language pathologist** (SLP) certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the first step to improving language and speech problems.

http://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/language_speech/