



Let's Talk

Improving Communication in Children With Intellectual Disabilities

“Our son Foster has mental retardation. He’s 7 years old now and is going to our neighborhood school. He is in a special education classroom for most of the day and goes into a regular first-grade class some of the time. He also has speech and language problems. He’s working with a speech-language pathologist who is helping him speak more clearly and tell us what he wants. He’s using a communication board to make his wants and needs known. Being able to communicate with us through pictures has really helped a lot.”

—Morgan and Griffin

Children With an Intellectual Disability

An intellectual disability is also sometimes called mental retardation or a developmental disability. Children with an intellectual disability usually have communication problems. But every child is different.

Listening and speaking problems can make school hard. Your child may have trouble making friends. He may get mad and not behave well because he can’t tell you what he is thinking. Children with an intellectual disability also may have problems working or living on their own when they are older.

Speech-Language Pathologists Can Help

Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, work with children with speech, language, and learning problems. It is possible that your child will work with an SLP the whole time she is in school. The SLP will work with your child’s school team to help your child. Team members include you, your child’s teacher, the SLP, and others who work with your child during the school day.

What SLPs Do

Your SLP will test your child to find out what he does well and what is difficult for him.

The SLP may work with your child alone, in a group, or in the classroom. Your child may need to work on:

- Understanding what others say

Fast facts

- Children with an intellectual disability often have problems with communication.
- Children can learn to communicate in many different ways.
- Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, can help.



Improving Communication in Children With Intellectual Disabilities

- Following directions
- Learning new words
- Saying words and sentences
- Looking at people when they talk
- Following rules for conversations

Your child may learn to communicate without talking. He may use pictures, written words, electronic devices, or sign language to communicate. This is called augmentative and alternative communication, or AAC.

As your child gets older, the SLP may help with life skills, such as shopping in a grocery store or filling out an application. The SLP can also help your child as he gets ready to graduate from high school and get a job or live on his own.

How You Can Help

You can help your child communicate at home, in child care, in the car, or anywhere your family goes. It is important to show your child that you are happy when she tries to communicate. Children learn by watching and doing, so talk with your child as much as you can.

It is ok if you speak a language other than English in the home. Your child can learn more than one language. It just might take some time.

If your child is older, show her how you do the grocery shopping, have her help make lists, or teach her safety tips for cooking. Some children with intellectual disabilities will be able to live on their own, so teaching these life skills is important.

“We’re amazed at the progress Foster is making. He uses his communication board and some signs at home and at school. The other kids in his class have learned how to talk to Foster, and they like helping him out. His speech is even getting better. The SLP gives us tips all the time, and she and the teacher plan everything together.”

—Morgan and Griffin

Having an intellectual disability can change your child’s life. Help is available.

To learn more about communication problems or to find an SLP near you who has been certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), visit www.asha.org or call 800-638-8255 or (TTY) 301-296-5650.

My SLP’s name is

Appointment

Compliments of
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)
and