

Specific Language Impairment

Definition:

Specific Language Disorder (SLI) is a language disorder not caused by any other known underlying neurological, cognitive, emotional or sensory disorder, such as Down Syndrome, Autism or Hearing Impairment. Also referred to as: speech delay, language delay, developmental language disorder, persistent language impairment.

Description:

SLI is an impairment of either receptive (language comprehension) language impairment and/or expressive (language expression), not caused by any other underlying condition, that affects an individual's underlying abilities in the areas of vocabulary, morphology (word structure) or syntax (sentence structure). It is one of the most common learning disabilities, affecting 7-8% of children in Kindergarten.

Characteristics:

- Limited vocabulary
- Incorrect use of morphemes (word structures). For example, a child may omit plural endings or appropriate verb endings (e.g., "He eat" instead of "He eats.")
- Short utterance/sentence length
- Grammatical errors that are not appropriate for a child's age or linguistic background
- SLI is not a reading disability; however, 50-75% of individuals with SLI have reading disabilities
- Language abilities are lower than cognitive abilities
- Many individuals with SLI are thought as as intelligent and bright
- Often labeled as "smart but unmotivated"

Causes:

The cause of SLI is unknown; however, studies show that there is a strong genetic link to the impairment. 50-70% of children with SLI have at least one parent with SLI.

Diagnosing this disorder:

SLI is often not given the label of "SLI", however individuals with SLI often carry a diagnosis of "Mixed Expressive/Receptive Language Impairment" or "Expressive Language Impairment." Language Impairment is diagnosed by a Speech-Language Pathologist.

Resources:

Websites:

- ASHA: www.asha.org
- National Institutes of Health (NIH): National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders: <http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/voice/pages/specific-language-impairment.aspx>

References:

Ervin, M. (2001, June 26). *SLI – What We Know and Why It Matters. The ASHA Leader*. Retrieved from <http://www.asha.org/Publications/leader/2001/010626/sli.htm>

(2011, March) Specific Language Impairment. National Institutes of Health: National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders: Retrieved from <http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/voice/pages/specific-language-impairment.aspx>