

## Higher Level Language and Metalinguistic Skills

Higher Level Language skills refer to those skills that go beyond basic vocabulary, word form, and grammar skills, and are critical to academic and social success. In addition to other areas, higher-level language skills include development of an advanced vocabulary, understanding word relationships, paraphrasing, reasoning, and developing the ability to look at things from another individual's perspective.

When a child has difficulty with higher-level language, the following are often observed:

- Inability to understand or make connections and associations between words, sentences, or stories.
- Poor academic performance
- Poor social pragmatics skills
- Difficulty with oral and written comprehension
- Poor writing skills
- Difficulty with understanding jokes, riddles, and humor

Four common areas of difficulty for children with higher-level language disorders are with verbal sequencing, determining cause and effect, making inferences, and understanding and using figurative language.

In order to make inferences and predictions a student must have good deductive reasoning skills and be able to look beyond what is given and fill in information that is missing. Sequencing requires that a student be able to put events in a logical order. In an academic setting, sequencing skills are critical to alphabetizing, putting events in chronological order, creating timelines, and telling or writing stories.

In order to determine the cause of event of an action, a student must see the relationships between the action and the outcome. Students who exhibit delays in determining causes may experience difficulties sequencing stories or comprehending and predicting outcomes of science experiments or math problems in school.

The ability to differentiate between literal and non-literal uses of language is an important part of a child's linguistic development. As grade level reading materials begin to incorporate metaphors and similes, difficulties in this area can negatively impact academic performance. When working with children who struggle with figurative language, it is often helpful to note that expressions that refer to tangible objects are often easier than those which only incorporate abstract ones. Appropriate intervention allows a student to practice listening to, reading, analyzing, discussing, and formulating figurative forms to improve both comprehension and expressions of figurative language, and to improve overall metalinguistic awareness of these modes of expression. Understanding and using figurative expressions is crucial not only for academic success, but for appropriate social development as well.

Many language-rich activities can help your child improve his or her higher-level language skills. Appropriate language intervention with a licensed and trained speech-language pathologist can help remediate these skills.

Reference: Paul, Rhea (2001) Language Disorders from Infancy through Adolescents: Assessment and Intervention.

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