Language-Based Learning Difficulties

WHAT IS A LANGUAGE-BASED LEARNING DIFFICULTY?

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) defines language-based learning difficulties as problems with the ability to read, spell, and/or write at an appropriate level for an individual’s age.

The disorder is not associated with intelligence. Most individuals diagnosed with a language-based learning disability have average to above average IQ levels.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF A LANGUAGE-BASED LEARNING DIFFICULTY

Individuals with a language-based learning difficulty may have problems with the following:

- Reading and comprehension
- Understanding and following instructions
- Identifying sounds from written letters
- Learning the alphabet
- Learning new vocabulary
- Spelling
- Differentiating left from right
- Expressing ideas clearly (i.e., using vague expressions and unspecific vocabulary)
- Recalling numbers in sequence
- Mixing up the order of letters in words (e.g., 'wired' for weird’)
- Mixing up the numbers in calculations

HOW CAN I HELP?

There are several strategies that can be used to help support individuals with language-based learning difficulties.

To aid understanding:

- Give short, simple instructions
- Introduce new information slowly
- Repeat and emphasize key points
- Give extra time to process information given
- Provide visual cues (e.g., pictures, drawings) and concrete materials (i.e., real objects) to support information or instructions given
- Use gestures and/or demonstrate instructions given
- Avoid sarcasm and explain metaphoric language if used
- Use direct (rather than indirect) instructions (e.g., “Sit down” rather than “Why are some people are still standing up?”)
- Check understanding by getting the person to repeat information in their own words
To aid expression:
- Give the person extra time to form a response
- Provide models of grammatically correct sentences that he or she can use
- Encourage the person to use gestures or draw pictures to help convey the message
- Provide two options to choose from (e.g., is it x or y?)
- Gives lots of praise and acknowledge expressive efforts and attempts to increase confidence and motivation

HOW CAN A SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPIST HELP?
A Speech and Language Therapist can work with individuals with language-based learning difficulties in several ways.

Speech and Language Therapists are trained to:
- Identify individuals with language-based learning difficulties
- Administer assessments to evaluate a person's speech and language ability
- Evaluate results of assessments to identify an individual's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the severity of any speech and language difficulties present
- Set personalised therapy goals and provide specific intervention to work on areas of difficulties identified
- Consult and collaborate with teachers, other professionals (e.g. occupational therapist, psychologists, doctors) and caregivers (e.g. family members) to discuss how to best support the individual in his or her daily environment

Treatments designed by a Speech and Language Therapist may include, but are not limited to:
- Intervention with spoken language (speaking and listening)
- Intervention with articulation (pronunciation)
- Developing strategies to be used in the classroom and providing modifications on how new information can be presented in class to aid comprehension
- Training in the use of planning strategies to help organise and focus written work
- Going through the use of different language strategies in classroom activities and assignments (e.g., using story maps) to aid understanding and expression

FINDING A SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPIST
In Singapore, Speech and Language Therapists work in community settings as well as in private practice. This includes restructured hospitals, voluntary welfare organizations (VWOs), private speech therapy centres, and private hospitals.

The Speech And Language Therapy Singapore (SALTS) website has a directory of Speech and Language Therapists practising in Singapore. A search on the following link can be done to find one near you: https://salts.org.sg/advanced-slt-search/
REFERENCES