

What are Receptive Language Skills?



What are Receptive Language skills? Receptive Language skills refer to a child's ability to cognitively process and understand verbal language. Receptive Language relies on receptive vocabulary (how many words, when heard, does a child know and understand the meaning of), the ability to interpret spoken language (can a child process words within the context of a sentence), and the ability to decode complex grammar (does a child know who was being waved at in the sentence, "The boy was waved to by the girl"). Receptive language has to do with *"input"* to the child rather than *"output"* from the child. A receptive language delay is a challenge that is often diagnosed in early childhood (ages 2 through 5) since children utilize receptive language abilities even before they begin to speak. Similar to a sponge, children must absorb information before they can squeeze it out by speaking. Delays in receptive language are sometimes associated with developmental disabilities such as Autism or intellectual disabilities, but not always. It is important that a child who is thought to have a receptive language delay also receive a hearing evaluation from a physician to rule out the possibility of a physiological auditory problem.

Receptive Language Difficulties at Home and at School.

A young child who has strong receptive language skills can point to simple pictures in a book (like a dog) when you say Dog or Woof, can understand and respond to simple verbal conversation, and can also follow simple verbal instructions.

Young children who struggle with these tasks may have weak receptive language skills, and a psychologist will be able to differentiate between a receptive language delay or poor attentional control or poor behavioral compliance.

An older child who has strong receptive language skills follows complex, multiple-step verbal instructions, accurately interprets complex grammar, responds appropriately to questions and participates in conversations, and performs well when taught through verbal instruction. Older children who struggle with these tasks may have weak receptive language skills, and a psychologist will be able to differentiate between a receptive language delay or poor attentional control or poor behavioral compliance. Across all age groups, weak receptive language skills may manifest in disruptive behaviors, frustration, poor attention, poor eye contact, a dislike of school and other verbally structured activities, and an inability to follow instructions or complete school tasks.

Detecting a specific weakness in receptive language can be difficult because a child may appear to have receptive language problems (e.g., they do not follow directions) but poor receptive language skills may not be the root of the problem. In fact, the child may be comprehending the spoken language and its meaning accurately, but may rather be struggling with planning and executive functioning skills. In order to specifically test if a child does have a receptive

language deficit, psychologists often complete one or more tests with a child to understand their capacity for receptive language. These tests may include the Listening Comprehension subtest on the WIAT-III, Comprehension of Instructions on the NEPSY-II, PPVT 4, or Receptive Vocabulary on the WPPSI-IV.

To learn more about receptive language disorders, check out these articles:

[Understanding Receptive language difficulties](#): A short description of what to look for in children with receptive language problems.

[How your child learns to understand language](#): Excellent source of information about receptive language skills and acquisition.

[Language skills, peer rejection, and the development of externalizing behavior from kindergarten to fourth grade](#): provides research on receptive language skills, peer relationships, and externalizing behaviors in early grade-school children.

[Childhood Language Skills and Adult Literacy: A 29-year Follow Up Study](#): This article assesses the trajectory of childhood receptive language skills and early influences on the course of language development.

[Children's Language Ability and Psychosocial Development: A 29-Year Follow-up Study](#): This article discusses the link between childhood receptive language skills to psychosocial outcomes in later life.

[Definitions of Language Disorders](#)– General guide to language

disorders and the role of speech and language therapists.