



Identify the Signs of Communication Disorders During Better Hearing and Speech Month

*8%–9% of Children Suffer From Speech Disorders,
Many Parents Wait Too Long to Seek Treatment*

(Hawkinsville, GA) May 1, 2014—With 8%–9% of young children suffering from speech disorders, May’s Better Hearing and Speech Month is the perfect time for parents to learn how to recognize the early signs of these disorders. Hawkinsville based speech-language pathologist, Cassie Whiggum, is encouraging parents to educate themselves through the Identify the Signs campaign, a national effort of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). The campaign is designed to combat an overall lack of awareness about communication disorders—a major barrier to treatment for the more than 40 million total Americans who suffer.

Speech, language, and hearing disorders are among the most common disabilities in the United States. However, unlike many other disabilities, these disorders often are reversible and even preventable with early intervention. Unfortunately, many parents do not recognize the first signs of these disorders. In young children, early treatment can help prevent them from falling behind academically, socially, and in other key areas at a critical time in their development.

“As an ASHA member and certified speech-language pathologist, I see the benefits of early intervention every day. Unfortunately, I also see the consequences of parents’ and others’ waiting too long to seek treatment—which is why the Identify the Signs campaign is so important,” said Cassie Whiggum with Taylor Rehabilitation, Hawkinsville, GA.

“While it is certainly never too late to seek help, treatment is most successful, less expensive, and takes the shortest amount of time when a parent or loved one is able to pick up on the earliest signs of these disorders. As May is Better Hearing and Speech Month, I suggest all parents familiarize themselves with these signs at IdentifytheSigns.org and seek an assessment from a certified speech-language pathologist

if they have any questions. One should not assume a child will ‘outgrow’ speech or language difficulties. There is never harm in seeking an assessment, whether it results in putting a parent’s mind at ease or identifying a potential issue in a child that can be treated.”

In children, parents should watch for the following signs of speech and language disorders:

- Does not interact socially (infancy and older)
- Does not follow or understand what you say (starting at 1 year)
- Says only a few sounds or words or makes only a few gestures (18 months to 2 years)
- Says words that are not easily understood (18 months to 2 years)
- Does not combine words (starting at 2 years)
- Struggles to say sounds or words (3 to 4 years)

In adults, signs of speech and language disorders include:

- Struggles to say sounds or words (stuttering)
- Repeats words or parts of words (stuttering)
- Says words in the wrong order (expressive aphasia)
- Struggles with using words and understanding others (global aphasia)
- Has difficulty imitating speech sounds (apraxia)
- Speaks at a slow rate (apraxia)
- Produces slurred speech (dysarthria)

Along with speech and language deficits, SLPs evaluate and treat persons who have difficulty swallowing, also known as dysphagia. In a recent survey completed by the American Speech, Language, and Hearing Association in 2013, SLPs in the healthcare setting spent at least 42% of their time with adult patients addressing swallowing difficulties. Swallowing difficulties have been known to be prevalent in as high as 22% of persons over the age of 50 with approximately 10 million Americans evaluated with swallowing difficulties each year. Swallowing difficulties negatively impact quality of life functioning. Impaired swallowing can cause significant morbidity and mortality. Like speech and language deficits in children and adults, swallowing difficulties are often treatable.

In adults, signs of swallowing difficulties include:

- coughing during or right after eating or drinking
- wet or gurgly sounding voice during or after eating or drinking
- extra effort or time needed to chew or swallow
- food or liquid leaking from the mouth or getting stuck in the mouth
- recurring pneumonia or chest congestion after eating
- weight loss or dehydration from not being able to eat enough

As a result, adults may have:

- poor nutrition or dehydration

- risk of aspiration (food or liquid entering the airway), which can lead to pneumonia and chronic lung disease
- less enjoyment of eating or drinking
- embarrassment or isolation in social situations involving eating

For more signs, treatment information, and other resources, visit <http://identifythesigns.org>. To schedule an assessment with Cassie Whiggum, contact Taylor Rehabilitation, 202 Perry Highway, Hawkinsville, GA at 478-783-3474.

Article by: Cassie Whiggum, SLP, CCC

**All information provided for this article can be found at www.asha.org.*