

# A Guide to Some of the Most Common Types of Speech & Language Disorders

Although much of our communication is done nonverbally, our voices still play a significant role in how we connect with and relate to others. As such, speech and language disorders can profoundly affect people's personal and professional lives, whether this manifests as challenges in their academic performance, career advancement, or daily functioning. Not only do these disorders create difficulties in understanding others and being understood, but they can also impact an individual's self-esteem, relationships, and overall quality of life.

In this article, we'll delve into the definition and causes of speech and language disorders and cover some of the most common kinds. Then we'll discuss various avenues for finding treatment, support, and healing. All of this information can be useful whether you or a loved one is experiencing one of these disorders or you're simply seeking to learn more about this topic for personal or professional reasons.

## What Are Speech and Language Disorders?

[Speech disorders](#) occur when someone has trouble communicating with other people, including both speaking and listening, whether due to an injury, physical condition, psychological concern, or some other factor. [Language disorders](#) are characterized by problems with understanding or being understood by other people, whether through writing, speaking, or picking up on non-verbal cues.

Depending on the speech or language disorder someone is facing, it may go away on its own without treatment. However, many of these disorders require professional intervention. Left unaddressed, people with speech and language disorders may experience worsening symptoms and, subsequently, a lower quality of life. These conditions can impact a person's self-esteem, performance at school and work, and personal relationships, and even lead to challenges like bullying. Thus, prompt attention to speech and language disorders is essential.

## What Causes Speech and Language Disorders?

There isn't always one specific cause of a speech and language disorder, and impairments may be caused by differing factors, including the following:

- Autism
- Tumors
- Hearing loss
- Cancer
- Traumatic brain injury
- Genetics
- Intellectual disability

- Cleft lip and palate
- Cerebral palsy
- Ear infections
- Dyslexia
- Substance use
- Developmental delay
- Stress
- Muscle weakness
- Stroke
- Premature birth or low birth weight
- Down syndrome
- Vocal fold pathology
- Craniofacial anomalies
- Mental health disorders

This list is not exhaustive, and having one of the above conditions does not mean someone will necessarily develop a speech and language disorder. However, it could put them at higher risk of one, particularly when combined with other personal or environmental factors.

### **Common Types of Speech and Language Disorders**

There are numerous kinds of speech and language disorders, and each has its own signs, symptoms, and recommended treatment approaches. Below are some of the most common types:

- **Apraxia of Speech (AOS):** People with AOS face challenges in saying what they'd like to say because of a disconnect between their brain and mouth muscles. Speaking requires quick, consistent movements of the muscles in the mouth, which is what those with this disorder struggle with. Thus, AOS is a motor disorder, rather than a cognitive condition.
- **Stuttering:** Also known as stammering, stuttering refers to a speech disorder in which the individual's usual speaking patterns are interrupted by the unintentional repetition of sounds, words, and syllables. When someone has this disorder, it causes the muscles in the mouth to twitch uncontrollably, resulting in the stutters. People with this condition may be at an increased risk of developing mental health conditions like anxiety or depression, as they may feel self-conscious in social situations or face judgment from others. However, stuttering is not caused by an underlying mental health disorder.
- **Dysarthria:** When someone has dysarthria, a motor speech disorder, they have a hard time speaking because the muscles in their mouth that they use to talk are weak or damaged. This can make it difficult for people to understand what's being said. Dysarthria can be caused by brain injuries, stroke, some medications, and conditions that impact the nervous system. Therefore, it can impact people of all ages.

- **Lisping:** Lisping is a type of speech impediment that results from incorrect tongue placements. It causes someone to make the “th” sound when attempting to say a word or sentence involving the letters ‘s’ and ‘z’, making it a functional speech disorder. There are four different types of lisps, all of which stem from some type of abnormality in regards to where the tongue falls in the mouth while speaking.
- **Spasmodic Dysphonia:** Spasmodic dysphonia is a type of neurological disorder that causes involuntary spasms during speech, leading the voice to break and sound airy, tense, or strained without warning. This disorder affects the muscles that control the vocal cords, meaning that treatment often focuses on strengthening them.
- **Cluttering:** Cluttering is a language or fluency disorder that makes it challenging for other people to understand what the individual with the disorder is saying. People with this disorder may talk too fast, blend sounds or thoughts together, make regular sudden pauses, or use poor grammar, all of which can make their speech sound incoherent, unclear, and muddled. Individuals experiencing cluttering often don’t have the self-awareness to realize how their speech is coming out, which may cause them to avoid seeking treatment.
- **Selective Mutism:** Selective mutism is an anxiety disorder that causes a person to have trouble communicating in certain social situations due to intense feelings of fear and anxiety. Once the person is back in a comfortable, familiar environment, they’re able to speak just fine. It’s important for individuals with this disorder to receive treatment from a mental health professional as well as a speech-language therapist.
- **Aphasia:** When people have a stroke, traumatic brain injury, or degenerative disease, they may develop aphasia, impairing their ability to speak or understand other people who are speaking. Some common symptoms of aphasia include difficulty finding the right words, using unrecognizable words, speaking incoherently, and talking in incomplete sentences.
- **Speech Delay:** Although every child progresses on their own timeline when learning how to speak, speech delays occur when a child doesn’t meet certain milestones in their speech development. They may not talk as much as other kids their age or use language that is developmentally behind. While some speech delays go away on their own with time, others signal more serious issues that must be treated professionally.

### **Treatment for Speech and Language Disorders**

The frontline treatment for speech and language disorders is often speech therapy, but the amount of time an individual spends in treatment can vary depending on the concern and its severity. Disorders that greatly impact the person’s daily function and quality of life are often met with more rigorous approaches. Like many physical and mental health treatments, the cost of speech therapy can be expensive, particularly if it’s private, but insurance and other options can lower its cost.

In speech therapy, a licensed language therapist who received their education in speech-language pathology works with clients to improve their ability to speak and use other skills associated with language. Clients may work on articulation, swallowing, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and more.

Speech therapy often takes place locally, but some people may choose to access [online speech therapy](#), which involves getting support from a licensed language therapist virtually. This option may be useful for those who are limited on time or feel more comfortable getting support from the familiarity and privacy of their home.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Speech and language disorders span all ages and backgrounds, impacting individuals' lives in unique ways. Communication forms the foundation for relationships, as humans' ability to interact by speaking and using body language sets us apart from other species. Therefore, struggling in this area can be particularly challenging, affecting meaningful social interactions and everyday life.

The good news is that there are promising options for treating speech and language disorders, offered by professionals who have dedicated their careers and lives to helping people through these hurdles. While not every disorder can be cured, symptoms may be improved enough to where individuals can still enjoy a fulfilling and high quality of life.