



## Ask the Expert: The Role of a Speech-Language Pathologist in Supporting Individuals with ADHD

Enhancing Communication, Executive Function, and Social Skills

Presented by: Letizia S. Hendrickson, MS CCC-SLP, ADHD-RSP

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### Letizia S. Hendrickson, MS CCC-SLP, ADHD-RSP



A practicing speech-language pathologist in the Los Angeles area for over 15 years and specialize in assessments of communication disorders, clinical education and ADHD.

#### SPEAKER DISCLOSURES

##### Relevant Financial Disclosures:

- Employed as Clinical Coordinator and Supervisor at The Learning Grove private practice serving pediatric and adult populations.
- Part of the West Coast University faculty for their CDS Masters program.

##### Relevant Non-Financial Disclosures:

- Serve on the Board of Directors of CSHA:
  - Secretary and Treasurer 2024/2025
  - President-Elect 2025-2026
- Serve on the Education Committee of CHADD.
- Member of ASHA and their SIG-01 & SIG-17 groups
- Clinical supervisor for SLPAs, CFs, and SLP graduate clinical externs
- Co-host of the podcast WTH ADHD.

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### Learning Objectives

#### Learner Outcome 1

Identify the communication and executive function challenges commonly associated with ADHD

#### Learner Outcome 2

Explain how speech therapy addresses social communication, language processing, executive function, literacy skills, self-awareness, speech production and voice disorders in individuals with ADHD

#### Learner Outcome 3

Describe evidence-based speech therapy approaches and strategies that support communication and executive function in individuals with ADHD

#### Learner Outcome 4

Recognize the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in ADHD management and how speech-language pathologists contribute to family-centered care.



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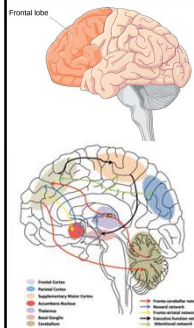
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## Overview of ADHD and Executive Function



- Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)**  
A neurodevelopmental condition characterized by persistent patterns of **inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity** that interfere with functioning or development.
- Executive Function**  
The prefrontal cortex located in the frontal lobe plays a crucial role in controlling attention, memory (specifically working memory), and inhibiting impulses, acting as the brain's executive function center, which is impacted in ADHD.
- Executive Function and Communication**  
Working memory, cognitive flexibility, inhibition control, language processing, social communication, literacy and speaking.
- ADHD and the Whole Brain**  
The lobes in the brain are a connected network and the frontal lobe makes decisions about these signals.

Barkley, R. (2011). DSM-5. Purpura-Ouallid, D., et al. (2011).

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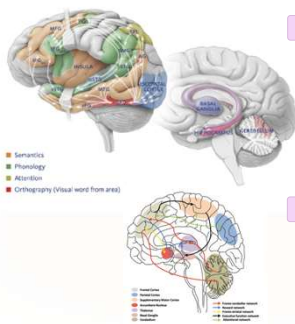
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## Speech and Language Processing



- Speech and Language Processing**

  - Frontal lobe: speech production, inhibiting thereof
  - Temporal lobe: comprehension, meaning
  - Parietal lobe: associates language-related information from auditory, visual and sensory sources
  - White matter pathways: connect areas in order to facilitate communication
  - Left hemisphere: primarily responsible for language processing for monolingual adults. Children use both hemispheres during early development.
- ADHD and Communication**  
**Brain regions and processes impacted in ADHD overlap areas vital for processing of receptive language, expressive language, motor speech, fluency, reading, writing and pragmatic/social language.**

Brybaert, Marc. (2021). Purpura-Ouallid, D., et al. (2011).

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## ADHD and Communication Challenges

Difficulties related to communication stem from impaired cognitive processes of language processing, attention, memory, executive function and impulse inhibition

**Comprehension:** understanding language (e.g., verbal instructions, written narrative, multi-step tasks, abstract language)

**Expression:** language output (e.g., speaking, writing)

**Fluency/stuttering:** dysfluent speech (e.g., stuttering, cluttering)

**Pragmatic language/social aspects:** non-verbal communication (e.g., attending to body language, interpreting tone, "reading" communicative intent, conversational turns)

**Voice and Prosody:** vocal dysfunction, pitch modulation to convey meaning (e.g., nodules, hoarseness, monotone)

**Literacy:** reading, writing (e.g., decoding and attending to written information, generating written content)

**Memory:** remembering information (e.g., attention, verbal working memory and processing rate dependent)

**Attention:** attending to stimuli (required for memory, comprehension, expression, pragmatic aspects of communication)

Geurts, B. M., & Embrechts, M. (2008).

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## The Role of the Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP)

SLPs work to prevent, assess, diagnose, and treat speech, language, social communication, cognitive-communication, and swallowing disorders in children and adults.

SLPs Scope of Practice per the American Speech-Language and Hearing Association (ASHA)

- **Cognition** - Attention, memory, problem solving, executive functioning
- **Speech Production** - Motor planning and execution, articulation, phonological (processes)
- **Fluency** - Stuttering, cluttering
- **Voice** - Phonation quality, pitch, loudness, alaryngeal voice
- **Auditory Habilitation/Rehabilitation** - Speech, language, communication, and listening skills impacted by hearing loss, deafness, auditory processing
- **Language** - Spoken and written language (listening, processing, speaking, reading, writing, pragmatics)
  - Phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics
  - Pragmatics (language use and social aspects of communication)
  - Prelinguistic communication (e.g., joint attention, intentionality, communicative signaling)
  - Paralinguistic communication (e.g., gestures, signs, body language)
  - Literacy (reading, writing, spelling)

American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA). Scope of Practice (2020)

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## Speech-Language Pathologists –Where we work

-  **Early Intervention**  
Via state developmental programs such as the Regional Center: one-on-one in-home services for speech and language or group settings to address early communication strategies and social/pragmatic language with a family centered approach.
-  **Schools**  
Provide pre-school push-in services, classroom-based strategies to teachers, teach compensatory strategies for difficulty with complex instructions, support gaps in knowledge base in a group setting or via a pull-out model in order to access the core curriculum.
-  **Medical**  
Provide one-on-one clinical therapeutic intervention addressing all domains impacted as it relates to communication to attain functional communication.
-  **Private Practice**  
Provide one-on-one therapy in a clinical or home setting to address communication difficulties related to activities of daily living in all settings including school, home, peer interaction, academic and work challenges.

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## Language Processing and Executive Function

-  **Following Directions**  
Difficulty with complex instructions
-  **Working Memory**  
Struggles retaining and processing information
-  **Organization**  
Challenges sequencing thoughts and ideas

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## Social Communication Challenges



**Conversation Difficulties**  
Struggles initiating and maintaining interactions



**Nonverbal Cues**  
Trouble interpreting body language and facial expressions, tone



**Pragmatic Language**  
Difficulties with turn-taking, topic maintenance, appropriate responses

Leonard, M. A., Misch, R., & Lorch, E. P. (2011).

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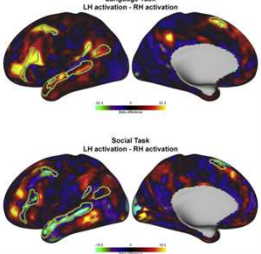
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## Social Communication Challenges – The Language Connection

**Overlap of Language and Social Communication**  
Regions activated in the brain for language processing overlap with regions for social/pragmatic processing.

**Systematic to Unified Approach**  
Speech language pathologists identify and provide foundational skills which scaffold to higher cognitive skills using an individualized treatment approach unique to the individual's needs/

Raza, R., et al. (2022) Carruthers, S., Taylor, L., Sedillo, H., & Phipps, G. (2022).

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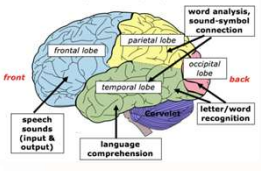
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## Literacy Challenges

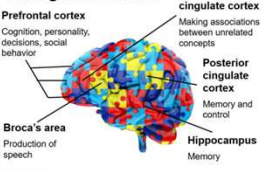
**Reading Comprehension**  
Difficulty understanding and retaining text  
Struggles with inference and main ideas

**Writing Organization**  
Problems with structure and sequencing  
Difficulty expressing thoughts clearly

**The Reading Brain**  
(the left hemisphere)



**Writing and the brain**



Leach, E. P., Misch, R., Flinn, R. A., O'Henderson, J., & Lorch, E. P. (2010).

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## Literacy Challenges

### Co-occurring Delays or Disorders

Language-based learning disabilities often present

Research indicates that these literacy challenges are often related to underlying language impairments, suggesting that interventions targeting language skills can positively impact literacy outcomes.

SLP interventions support literacy development



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## Speech Production and Fluency

### Stuttering

Increased instances in ADHD population  
Self-monitoring strategies help

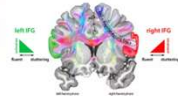
### Cluttering

Rapid, disorganized speech patterns  
Difficulty with speech clarity

### Communication Anxiety

Leads to avoidance behaviors  
SLPs address underlying concerns

What causes people to stutter?



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## Voice Disorders in ADHD

### Excessive Volume

Impulsivity leads to yelling behaviors

### Throat Clearing

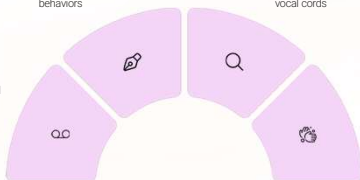
Repetitive behaviors damage vocal cords

### Vocal Nodules

Increased risk due to vocal misuse

### Vocal Hygiene

Education prevents long-term damage



Loft, B.A., Secondini, M. (2016).

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### Evidence-Based Interventions

- 1** Interactive Activities  
Engage attention and promote learning
- 2** Visual Aids  
Schedules, graphic organizers, cue cards
- 3** Direct Instruction  
Self-regulation and organization skills
- 4** Structured Practice  
Communication skills in varied contexts

Blapp, K. D., Brown, K. E., Miranda, P., (2004) ; Sullivan, M. M., Kennedy, M., et al. (2007) ; Ukrainetz, T., et al. (2014)



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### Collaboration with Families and Educators



Successful Outcomes Improved communication skills	
Integrated Approach Consistent strategies across settings	
Family Involvement Home practice reinforces therapy goals	
School Support Classroom accommodations and techniques	

Machado-Nascimento, N., Melo E Kummer, A., & Lemos, S. M. (2015).

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### Importance of Early Intervention

Improved Outcomes Earlier support leads to better results	
Family Benefits Helps households where ADHD runs in families	
Individualized Plans Based on unique strengths and needs	

Landa, R. J. (2005).

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### Case Study Examples



Elementary Student  
Improved classroom participation after pragmatic language therapy



Adolescent  
Enhanced academic writing through executive function support



Adult  
Better workplace communication through self-monitoring strategies

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### Conclusion and Key Takeaways

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Essential Component  
Speech therapy critical in ADHD management

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Comprehensive Approach  
Addresses communication, executive function, literacy

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Collaborative Success  
Team approach yields best outcomes



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### Q&A Session



Contact information:  
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References and Further Reading

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)	Position statements on ADHD
Journal of Attention Disorders	Research on communication interventions
International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders	Studies on pragmatic language in ADHD
Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research	Evidence-based practice guidelines

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