



Praxis für
Stimm- und Sprachtherapie

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Short information:
Language
disorders

LANGUAGE DISORDERS

POSSIBLE SIGNS OF A LANGUAGE DISORDER*:

- frequent saying of "yes"
- repetition of what was said
- no reply / reaction towards speech
- "unclear" replies
- behavioural problems, e.g. patterns such as trying to disturb
- withdrawal (e.g. extreme shyness, insecurity)
- extraordinary sense of orientation

Language disorders or "understanding language" disorders cannot be observed directly. Visible is only the reaction of the child towards the fact, that the language has not been fully understood. Often children develop strategies to compensate their missing understanding (e.g. often to say "yes" when they have not understood what was said.)

This is often the reason for the fact that language disorders have not been noticed contrarily to articulation and phonation disorders or problems in the usage of grammar.

Language disorders are often wrongly equalled to:

- lack of concentration
- low intelligence
- hyperactivity
- refusal
- aggressive behaviour
- low social competence

In most cases these disorders are right from the beginning mis-interpreted as behavioural problems, lack of concentration, low intelligence etc. It may happen that for instance a child is seen as aggressive and difficult. Massive difficulties at school may develop because the language disorder was not identified! Despite rather perfect arithmetical performance, the child fails when it comes to text-related tasks, as these require a sufficient understanding of the language.

Comparison: To comprehend and get a feeling for language disorders one might remember the problems arising when trying to understand a foreign language. Of course, this is only a very basic description of the actual problem.

Understanding language is the basis for language development.

Understanding language is a very difficult task and comprises of a number of skills. The child has to be able to:

- hear the language
- pay attention to the language
- recognize sound chains (B-A-L)
- decode the meaning (= "ball")
- put this in context with "worldly knowledge"
- find out what the person tries to tell her/him
(Is the ball shown to me? Is the ball given to me? Am I to give the ball?)

Understanding language in the narrow sense comprises three levels:

- **words** (understanding their meaning)
- **sentences** (understanding grammatical forms and the meaning of sentences)
- **texts** (understanding a conversation / text)

Connections between understanding language and consequent skills:



Memory: To understand language one has to be able to memorize what was said.



Concentration: To understand language it is necessary to concentrate on what is said. Represents understanding language a strenuous process, concentration flattens and tiring is the consequence. Conversely, a lack of concentration may lead to an impaired ability to understand language.

Interactions of language disorders:

- reduced auditory memory threshold
- limited attentiveness
- concentration difficulties
- hearing problems that have not been treated early on may be the reason for massive language understanding problems later.

Aims and objectives of a language (understanding) therapy:

- Exercises to increase memory threshold
- To support and further the understanding of words
- To support and further the grammatical understanding
- To support and further the understanding of texts
- Help to develop self-help

The flyer cites from a paper held by Dr. Werner Gebhard (speech and language therapist at the Heckscher clinic in Solln, Munich, Germany), Kinderarche, Neuperlach, Germany. We are grateful for the kind support we received from there..