

Have You Been Paying Attention to Your Child's Language?

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Significant difficulties with inattention and/or hyperactivity, known as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), affect 7% of Australian children. Although medications and behavioural treatments are available, children with ADHD continue to experience poorer academic and social outcomes.

Often, children also have one or more other disorders in addition to ADHD, and this may have a negative impact on outcomes. It is crucial to identify these issues to improve ADHD management. Language difficulties, for example, are common in children with ADHD. However, standardised language assessments are not commonly used during assessments for ADHD, so language difficulties may be diagnosed incorrectly or go unrecognised.

Recently, the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute in Melbourne conducted a study looking at language problems in children with ADHD. Children aged 6-8 years from selected state schools across Western and Eastern Victoria were involved and divided into either the group of children with ADHD or the group of children without ADHD (control group). Parent and teacher reports, interviews and standardised assessments were used to gather information.

Forty percent of the children with ADHD were found to have language problems, compared to 17% of the controls. Girls and boys with ADHD were equally likely to have language problems (42% of girls versus 40% of boys). Even when factors including age and gender of the children, diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder and parental education levels, single parent status and mental health were taken into account, the children with ADHD were still more likely to have language problems than the other children. ADHD status was the only factor that could be used to predict the likelihood of language problems.

This study produced strong evidence that language difficulties in the children with ADHD were linked to much poorer academic functioning. When compared to children with ADHD alone, the children with ADHD and language problems had poorer word reading, math computation and academic competence. The assessment results of children with ADHD only were within normal range for academic functioning, however the results of children with ADHD and language problems were not. This demonstrates the unique contribution of a child's language skills to academic functioning.

Less than half of the children with ADHD and language problems had seen a speech pathologist, and only a quarter were still attending speech pathology.

Unexpectedly, ADHD was not associated with poorer social functioning. The researchers suggest that children with ADHD may already experience poorer social functioning because of reasons other than language ability. Another consideration is that language problems may have a greater influence on social skills as children mature and relationships with classmates become more complex.

In summary, this well-conducted study found that boys and girls with ADHD were more likely to have language difficulties and that language problems in children with ADHD were linked to significantly poorer academic functioning.

Suggestions:

- Box Hill Speech Pathology Clinic offers a communication screening assessment service to local kindergartens. Ask your child's teacher to organise for one of our clinicians to visit your kinder!
- As this study has shown language and poor academic achievement to be closely linked, children with ADHD should be referred for a language assessment if they are struggling academically.
- The Murdoch Childrens Research Institute wants you – visit <https://www.mcri.edu.au/research/projects/children%E2%80%99s-attention-project/cap-wants-see-your-brain> to get involved!



brainyNation.center

References:

Language Problems in Children With ADHD: A Community-Based Study

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2014/04/16/peds.2013-3355.full.pdf+html>

The Children's Attention Project: a community-based longitudinal study of children with ADHD and non-ADHD controls

<http://www.biomedcentral.com/content/pdf/1471-244X-13-18.pdf>

Vince Borg, Sarah Young, Vicky Andrews and Emma Lorenzin all have a special interest in child speech development and language difficulty. Book an appointment with them at Box Hill Speech Pathology Clinic on (03) 9899 5494 or direct your child speech questions to enquiries@speech-therapy.com.au.

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