ABSTRACT LANGUAGE

- Abstract terms are ideas that are not related to our five senses (smell, touch, sight, hear, taste)
- We often use abstract terms when we communicate with one another to create a clearer “picture” of what we are saying
- Translating our ideas into abstract concepts requires high-level brain functioning

EXAMPLES OF ABSTRACT IDEAS

- “The pain feels like a knife in my back”
- “I slept like a log”

ABSTRACT LANGUAGE AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

- People with DD may not always understand abstract language depending on which part of the brain is affected by their disability
- Sometimes people with DD use abstract language as a form of social learning or echoing what he/she has heard

Don’t assume that the person understands the abstract term just because he/she uses it

TIPS FOR USING LESS ABSTRACT LANGUAGE

- Reduce the number of words used to convey an idea
- Make eye contact and wait to see if what you said was understood
- Don’t use abstract terms to ‘soften’ a message (E.g., your mother has passed away)
- Instead, use concrete terms (E.g., your mother has died)
**COMMUNICATION**

**EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE**
- Is the ability to produce speech and communicate a message (both verbal and non-verbal)
- Some people can understand more than they are able to say
- Expressive language disorders typically result in below-average vocabulary skills, improperly used tenses (past, present, future), problems making complex sentences or problems remembering words

**RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE**
- Is how we understand what others communicate to us (verbal and non-verbal)
- Some people have a good vocabulary but don’t understand what the words mean or may not understand what you mean when you use the same words
- Thus, receptive language disorders cause difficulty with understanding communication

**SOCIAL INTERACTION AND UNDERSTANDING**
- A person’s ability to engage in social interactions does not mean they understand the meaning of what is being said
- Alternately, a person’s inability to engage in social interactions does not mean they are unable to understand the meaning

**EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TIPS**
- Reduce noise and distractions (including other people)
- Don’t assume someone can/cannot understand what you’re saying based on their verbal ability
- The more important the message, the clearer and less abstract it should be
- If you are doubt that the person understands, repeat the message using different words (E.g., “Get dressed” vs. “Put on your shirt”)

Expressive language involves a different part of the brain than receptive language. Therefore, damage to one part of the brain may impact only one aspect of communication.

It is important to rule out hearing or vision loss as possible causes of communication problems

SEE “COMMUNICATION QUICK TIPS” PAGE FOR MORE INFORMATION