A Brief Summary of Language Deprivation/Dysfluency in Individuals who are Deaf

Language Deprivation

Simply defined, Language Deprivation is the lack of exposure to accessible language. In most cases, this means childhood, although, this can also happen to adults.

Every human has a window of opportunity that is optimal for first language learning. When an individual is not exposed to language, any language, at an early age, their ability to learn language is compromised.

While language deprivation is fairly rare within populations of hearing people, it is not uncommon within the Deaf community. There are many reasons for this. It occurs in the family, in schools, and in social settings.

Some (not a comprehensive list) ways that language can be compromised include:

- Weak grammar
- Less vocabulary range
- Difficulty with abstract concepts
- Difficulty with verbs
- Difficulty with complex sentence structure

Language is not an indicator of intelligence. A person who suffers from language deprivation can have normal or even above average intelligence, but not be able to express it well. They can also have compromised social skills, poor emotional regulation, and weak ability to understand cause and effect.

Other types of Language Dysfluency

There are many reasons that anyone can struggle with various types of language dysfluency including medical conditions, mental illness, medications, trauma, intoxication, etc.

One reason that may present itself within (although not unique to) the Deaf population is the etiology of deafness.

Causes of deafness including pre-natal, peri-natal, and post-natal causes can sometimes impact how a person acquires or uses language.

In language dysfluency (including deprivation), the language use or patterns of use, may emulate language as used by individuals experiencing psychosis, with intellectual disabilities, etc. A clinical team working with an individual who is deaf, will need to attempt to differentiate language dysfluency from other potential issues.