

10 minutes on: Developmental Language Disorder



What is Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)?

DLD is a life-long condition characterised by difficulties with understanding and/or using spoken language. This results in children who have difficulty understanding what people say to them, and struggle to articulate their ideas and feelings. DLD has no single known cause and is likely a result of a number of biological, genetic and environmental risk factors.

DLD affects every individual differently and there are a wide variety of ways in which language problems may present and evolve over time.

Recent research shows that, on average, **2 children in every class of 30** will experience DLD severe enough to hinder academic progress. This is more common than Autism, however, DLD is not as widely known about!



DLD is a neurodevelopmental condition. Children do not grow out of DLD, but grow with it. Support from speech and language therapy and education can make a real difference for a person with DLD!

People with DLD can have difficulties with:

- Listening, attention, memory and language processing, particularly when lots of information is being given orally;
- Following instructions, understanding questions and narratives
- Understanding and remembering what has been said
- Understanding and using vocabulary
- Expressing what they want to say, including difficulties with word finding, grammar and sequencing their thoughts
- Social interaction, including having difficulties joining in conversations, understanding jokes, and non-literal language and
- Using language to express their thoughts and feelings and to regulate their behaviour and their interactions with other people.
- *Remember:* Language difficulties may also underlie behavioural issues such as anxiety or misbehaving in class.

Individuals with DLD are also at risk of difficulties with reading and writing, and with discriminating between different sounds either on their own or within words. For example, knowing that 'cat' and 'bat' are different words because the first sounds are different. This is known as phonological awareness.



Individuals with DLD may have difficulties with producing speech sounds, although not always.

Children with DLD often learn and understand better through visual and/or practical methods, rather than verbal methods. For example, they would understand a story better if they watched it being acted out and drew it, rather than being told it verbally.



How can you support your child at home?

- **Get your child's attention** – say their name before asking questions or giving instructions so they know when to listen
- **Ensure your child can see your face** to support their attention and listening
- **Use simple language and repeat if necessary** to support memory and provide as many opportunities for them to hear, see and use words
- **Talk calmly and slowly** to support their ability to process words
- **Give your child more time to respond** to help them process information
- **Use of symbols** – provide a picture and/or gesture to represent new words or concepts to support their understanding visually
- **Encourage your child to communicate with you** however they can
- **Check they have understood instructions or new information**
- **Help them learn skills to join in with other children.** For example, playing games at home to support turn taking and listening to others.



The role of Speech and Language Therapy

With their knowledge and expertise in speech, language and communication, speech and language therapists (SLTs) have a crucial role to play in diagnosis and management of DLD. SLTs teach strategies to children with DLD and those around them, which aim to reduce the impact of their difficulties and develop their language abilities to their maximum potential.

If you have any concerns about your child's speech and language, please talk to your teacher or SENCo. A referral can be made to your local Speech and Language Therapy department or information/advice can be provided.

Each year, DLD Awareness Day is celebrated. This year, on Friday 20th October 2023, we will be supporting RADLD in their campaign to make more people aware of the facts about DLD. Look out for information on Western Trust social media pages @westernhsctrust. Let's get everyone talking about DLD to help our children and young people with this condition get the support they need!

For further information, check out some popular websites with information and support for parents in their understanding of DLD:

- RADLD – www.radld.org
- Afasic – www.afasic.org.uk
- ICAN – www.ican.org.uk

