



Developmental Language Disorder

What is Developmental Language Disorder?

I have heard of Developmental Language Disorder – but what exactly is it?

Developmental language disorder (DLD) is a condition where children have problems understanding and/or using spoken language. There is no obvious reason for these difficulties, for example, there is no hearing problem or physical disability that explains them. In the past DLD was known as specific language impairment (SLI) but recently the name has changed so that it better reflects the types of difficulties children have.

A child can be diagnosed with DLD if their language difficulties:

- are likely to carry on into adulthood
- have a significant impact on progress at school, or on everyday life
- are unlikely to catch up without help

Do we know the cause of DLD?

DLD looks different in all children and can be complicated to understand because we don't really know the cause. Scientists think that the part of the brain responsible for speech and language might be wired a little differently from that of a person with more typical language development – but differences are subtle and won't show up on a brain scan. We also know that genes play an important part in DLD, but there is no medical test to see if a child has it or not. Studies have shown that in five year olds, DLD affects about two children in every classroom in primary school (about 7.6%) and that it is more common in boys than girls.

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Call 020 7843 2544 to arrange a free phone call from one of our speech and language therapists or email enquiries@ican.org.uk

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So, what sorts of problems would a child with DLD have?

For a diagnosis of DLD a child must have language difficulties that persist into school age and beyond. The features of DLD will vary with age but almost always children will have difficulty understanding spoken language. They may also have difficulties putting their thoughts into words and sentences. They might have some of these:

- Difficulty saying what they want to, even though they have ideas
- Struggle to find the words they want to use
- Talk in sentences but be difficult to understand
- Sound muddled; it can be difficult to follow what they are saying
- Find it difficult to understand words and long instructions
- Have difficulty remembering the words they want to say
- Find it hard to join in and follow what is going on in the playground

A child with DLD won't necessarily sound like a younger child; instead their speech might sound disorganised or unusual.

My child has a diagnosis of DLD – will they find it hard at school?

Children with DLD often struggle at school. This is because so much learning depends on being able to understand and use language. Children with DLD won't just 'pick up' language; they will need to be taught language skills in a special way. They can do well, but will need the right support in order to reach their full potential. This support will be from a speech and language therapist, along with other specialists like a language advisory teacher.

They may struggle because:

- they easily lose concentration as all their efforts are spent making sense of the language in instructions
- it's difficult to listen and work things out at the same time
- they find it hard to learn new words and ideas
- by the time they have thought how to say an answer, the teacher has moved on to something else

But, despite their difficulties with language, children with DLD can achieve well at school, both academically and socially. They just learn differently. Knowing their best learning style is therefore important.

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Can my child with DLD go to our local school?

Often children with DLD will be taught in their local schools. Sometimes they may go to a speech and language resource (a special class or department in a mainstream school), and occasionally they will go to a special school. This will depend on the type of difficulties they have, how severe their difficulties are and the types of provision near you. You should be involved in the decision about the best place for your child to go to school, along with the speech and language therapist and the local authority.

I'm worried about my child's talking and understanding, what should I do?

Contact your local speech and language therapy service and ask for your child to be assessed. Most local services will take a referral straight from a parent; you don't need to go through your doctor or health visitor.

I CAN also run the Enquiry Service, an information line run by speech & language therapists. If you have any questions about the speech, language or communication skills of a child you know, call us on 0207 843 2544 to book a call back at a time convenient for you. You can also email your questions to help@ican.org.uk.

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