

Developmental Language Disorder *Information for Parents*



Pride in our children's, young people's and families' services

What is Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)?

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. 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 on their own

It's important to remember that DLD affects every individual differently and there are a wide variety of ways in which language problems may present and evolve over time.

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.

What difficulties might a child with DLD have??

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 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
- using language to express their thoughts and feelings and to regulate their behaviour and their interactions with other people

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 sound is different. This is known as phonological awareness.

Do children with DLD find things difficult at school?

Children with DLD often struggle at school. This is because so much learning depends on being able to understand and use language.

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 onto something else

It's important to remember that children with DLD can do well at school but may need support or specific strategies in order to better understand and use language within the classroom environment.

Top tips for learning:

- **Gain the child's attention before giving instructions.** It can be easy to 'switch off' in class if language is too fast or you have difficulty understanding it.
- **Be clear and concise and try to give instructions in the order they need to be done.** For example, instead of saying "before you put your book in the tray, put your pencil away" say "put your pencil away. Then put your book in the tray".
- **Reduce your language.** Use short, simple sentences whenever you can. Slow your rate of speech down a bit to give the child a chance to process what you have said.
- **Use visual supports (pictures alongside speech).** Often, visual support such as pictures, signs and demonstration can be really helpful for children with language difficulties. These will usually help other children too, not just those with DLD.
- **Try to link words together.** Children with DLD often don't make links between words easily. Link new or harder words to simpler ones. Talk about all the aspects of a word – what does it sound like, what other words are similar in meaning, can you draw it or act it? Using word maps can be useful to teach new or unknown words.
- **Comment rather than question.** It is natural to us in conversation to ask a lot of questions. For some children with language difficulties though, this can become difficult and pressurising. Question words in particular are difficult to understand and can be confusing. Try to comment on what they are doing and model language rather than asking too many questions.
- **Recast.** If a sentence comes out in a muddle and there are grammatical errors, don't tell them they said it wrong. Instead, say it back for the child to hear with the errors corrected. This is called recasting. For example, if the child says "I goed shopping", you could say "that's right, you went shopping".
- **Check understanding.** Check that the child has understood what they have been asked to do, or the concept they have been taught. For some children, asking them to say back what they have to do in their own words will be helpful. For others, this is too hard. Getting the child (or the whole class) to repeat the important bits can be really useful.

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Information Leaflet adapted from:

ICAN Factsheet: DLD: <http://licensing.ican.org.uk/sites/licensing.ican.org.uk/files/pdfs/Developmental-Language-Disorder.pdf>

RCSLT DLD Giving Voice Factsheet: [file:///C:/Users/rbakertaylor/Downloads/rcslt-dld-factsheet%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/rbakertaylor/Downloads/rcslt-dld-factsheet%20(2).pdf)

Patient Advice and Liaison Service

For information about CPFT services or to raise an issue, contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on Freephone 0800 376 0775, or e-mail pals@cpft.nhs.uk

Out-of-hours service for CPFT mental health service users

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