

Understanding Aspects of SEND: Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)

1. What is Developmental Language Disorder? Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) is a communication disorder that affects a child's ability to understand and use language. It is not caused by hearing loss, intellectual disability or other developmental conditions. DLD can impact speaking, understanding, reading and writing and the challenges persist into adulthood. While the exact cause is unknown, DLD is believed to have a genetic and neurological basis. With appropriate support, individuals with DLD can develop effective communication skills and thrive in various areas of life. DLD affects approximately 7.6% of all children (2 children in every average primary class). (Speech and Language UK)

2. How can Developmental Language Disorder present? DLD varies widely among individuals, but common characteristics include:

- **Difficulty understanding language:** Struggling to follow instructions or grasp the meaning of words or process complex sentences.
- **Challenges with expressive language:** Finding it hard to put thoughts into words, use correct grammar or form complete sentences.
- **Word-finding difficulties:** Taking longer to retrieve the right words during conversations.
- **Limited vocabulary:** Having fewer words than peers of the same age.
- **Problems with social communication:** Difficulty participating in conversations or understanding non-verbal cues.
- **Reading and writing challenges:** Struggling with literacy skills due to underlying language difficulties.
- **Frustration or anxiety:** Emotional responses to difficulties in expressing thoughts or understanding others.

3. Ways to help manage Developmental Language Disorder Support for individuals with DLD should focus on enhancing communication skills and reducing the impact on daily life. Strategies include:

- **Speech and language therapy:** Encourage working with a therapist to develop language comprehension, vocabulary and grammar skills.
- **Use visual aids:** Support understanding with pictures, symbols or written cues.

- **Simplify language:** Use short, clear sentences and repeat instructions when needed.
- **Encourage alternative communication:** Use gestures, sign language or communication devices as needed.
- **Build vocabulary through play:** Incorporate games, stories and activities that encourage language development in a fun way.
- **Create a supportive environment:** Allow extra time for responses and encourage effort over perfection.
- **Collaborate with educators:** Develop Individualised Education Plans (IEPs) to include accommodations such as extra time or alternative assessments.
- **Promote confidence:** Celebrate successes and provide reassurance to reduce frustration and build self-esteem.

4. Where to find out more

- **RADLD** (www.radld.org): Provides resources, training and awareness for DLD.
- **Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT)** (www.rcslt.org): Offers information on accessing speech and language therapy services.
- **ICAN** (www.ican.org.uk): Supports children with communication challenges, including DLD.
- **Speech and Language UK** (speechandlanguage.org.uk): Support and resources for families and educators, including news and blogs.
- Book recommendations:
 - [Uncommon Understanding by Dorothy Bishop](#)
 - [Small Talk: Simple Ways to Boost Your Child's Speech and Language Development from Birth by Nicola Lathey](#)