



Developmental Language Disorder - DLD

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) was previously known as Specific Language Impairment (SLI) but recently that name has changed to better reflect the types of difficulties children have.

A child can be diagnosed with DLD if they have significant and persistent difficulties understanding and/or using spoken language, impacting on their progress at school, or on everyday life.

Recent research has shown that, on average, 2 children in every class will experience DLD severe enough to impact on academic progress. It is one of the most poorly recognised and understood disorders of childhood despite its prevalence.

There is no known cause of DLD and it is **NOT** caused by emotional difficulties or limited exposure to language. DLD is also **NOT** caused by other medical conditions such as hearing loss, physical impairment, learning difficulties or ASD; however children with these difficulties may also have DLD.

The signs of DLD

A child:

- ✿ May not talk as much and find it difficult to express themselves verbally
- ✿ May use language that sounds immature for their age
- ✿ May struggle to find words or used varied vocabulary
- ✿ May not understand, or remember, what has been said
- ✿ May have difficulties reading and using written language as they get older
- ✿ May display behavioural issues such as anxiety or misbehaving in class as a result of their language difficulties.

It is important to remember that DLD **looks different in each individual child** and that difficulties can change as a child gets older and needs to develop more complex skills.

The effects of DLD

- ✿ DLD is a long term condition that can have a big impact on learning and achievement in school
- ✿ Children with DLD are at risk of reading difficulties
- ✿ DLD can affect a child's social interaction skills
- ✿ Children with DLD often learn and understand more effectively through visual and practical methods.

Supporting a child with DLD (I CAN)

- ✿ **Get the child's attention.** Get the child's attention by getting down to their level, gaining eye contact, saying their name and getting them to look. In the classroom, the child may need more breaks from listening than the others as it is tiring and difficult for them.
- ✿ **Reduce your language.** Use short, simple sentences whenever you can. Say things 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". Slow your rate of speech down a bit to give them a chance to process.
- ✿ **Show them.** Often, visuals 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. Use as many senses as possible to teach a new concept. Look at it. Touch it. Draw it. Show the child what to do.
- ✿ **Summarise.** After you have given your classroom input or instructions to the class, summarise what you have said. Use short, simple sentences and simple words as far as possible. If there are several things that the children need to do, tell the children how many things there are to remember and count them off on your fingers, using simple words.
- ✿ **Link words.** 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? Word Aware is a great whole class or whole school approach to vocabulary teaching.
- ✿ **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 are confusing. Try to comment on what they are doing rather than asking a question.
- ✿ **Offer choices.** Sometimes it can be hard for children with DLD to remember words. Rather than "what do you want to eat?" try "would you like apple or banana?". For very young children, show them the objects on offer as well to start with. You can do a similar thing with answering more complicated questions. For example, if "what did you see at the castle?" is too hard try "did we see armour or swimsuits?" Start by offering obvious choices to give them confidence but you can gradually try offering more similar options.
- ✿ **Add a word.** If your child says a short phrase or sentence, say it back to them and add a word. For example, if your child says "doggy eating" you could say "yes, doggy's eating dinner". If your child says "the dog is eating dinner" you could say "yes, the dog is eating dinner hungrily".
- ✿ **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 your 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. I saw one teacher who would ask the whole class to say something back several times.