

DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER

INFORMATION FOR GUARDIANS AND EDUCATORS

Developmental language disorder (DLD) is a neurodevelopmental communication disorder that begins in childhood and typically persists into adulthood. It is diagnosed when a child or adult's difficulties with expressive and/or receptive language cannot be explained by other conditions (e.g., head injury, hearing loss, developmental delay, limited exposure to the language). If the child's language difficulties are related to a primary diagnosis such as developmental delay, it would be described as 'language disorder associated with developmental delay'.

DLD is present at birth and results from an interaction between genes and the language environment. 50-70% of children with DLD have a family member who also does. DLD is *not caused* by anything the adults in the child's life do (although through treatment they have *significant* influence in helping their child's language develop). DLD is not typically diagnosed until a child is at least 5 years old. Often these children have a history of **language difficulties** (previously called 'language delay') but not always.

DLD is *not* associated with intelligence – children with DLD have *many* strengths. They have a very specific need for support with the development of their language skills.

Children with DLD may require support with expressive and/or receptive language in the areas of semantics (word meaning and associations), syntax (word order, sentence structure), morphology (parts of words such as '-ed', '-ing'), phonology (meanings of speech sounds), telling narratives, and language processing (e.g., inferencing, predictions, identifying the main idea). They also often have difficulties with *written* language (i.e., reading and writing).

Starting intervention as early as possible is important. Treatment for DLD requires collaboration between the child, their guardian(s), their SLP, and their educators. The child must be willing to participate in treatment so they have a positive experience. Guardians share their observations of their child's communication successes

and difficulties in daily life and do home treatment practice between sessions with the SLP. The SLP designs treatment programs, selects appropriate treatment protocols, develops and advances goals, provides direct treatment, and measures the child's progress based on the child's needs and the input of their guardian(s). The child's educators also share their observations of the child's communication in the preschool / school setting and often uses strategies recommended by the SLP to facilitate language development in natural situations. With the right treatment and participation of guardian(s), children can make significant gains.

What does treatment look like? Treatment differs based on the age of the child. With younger children, treatment strategies are embedded into natural play and daily routines because that is what is functional for the child and what is clinically effective at their age. Drill-based tasks while seated at a table would be both inappropriate and ineffective. In school-aged children it is a combination of structured tasks, explicit discussion about language (e.g., word meaning, word associations, grammar), and carry-over into natural activities that strengthen the child's processing of language. In adolescence and adulthood, treatment involves structured tasks and explicit instruction and practice in functional activities.

RESOURCES

"Developmental Language Disorder"
National Institute on Deafness and Other
Communication Disorders
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services –
National Institutes of Health
<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/sites/default/files/Documents/health/voice/developmental-language-disorder.pdf>

DLD and Me
<https://dldandme.org/>

The DLD Project

<https://thedldproject.com/developmental-language-disorder-dld/>

Raising Awareness of Developmental Language Disorder

<https://radld.org/>

“Childhood Spoken Language Disorders”

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

<https://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/preschool-language-disorders/>

“DLD, Specific Learning Disorder, Specific Learning Disability: What’s the difference?”

Lisa Archibald

Language and Working Memory Lab, University of Western Ontario

https://www.uwo.ca/fhs/lwm/news/2022/02_16_DLDSLDM.html
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