

What is Developmental Language Disorder?

Developmental language disorder (DLD), previously known as Specific Language Impairment (SLI,) is a condition where children have problems understanding and/or using spoken language. There is no obvious reason for these difficulties such as no hearing problem, physical disability or medical diagnoses like Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

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 is hard 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. We know that genes play an important part in DLD, but there is no medical test to see if a child has it or not.

Prevalence:

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.

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

A child with DLD has 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.

What does it mean in terms of school?

Children with DLD often struggle at school since so much learning depends on being able to understand and use language. Children with DLD won't just 'pick up' language; they need to be taught language skills in a special way. They can do very well, but will need the right support in order to reach their full potential.

They may struggle because:

- they easily lose concentration as all their efforts are spent making sense of what is being said
- 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

Further information:

This information is taken from ICAN'S Developmental Language Disorder fact sheet. You can find further information at -

I CAN Help enquiry service www.ican.org.uk/help

Talking Point www.talkingpoint.org.uk