



Developmental Language Disorder

NZ RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE BASED FACTSHEET

What is Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)?

Developmental language disorder (DLD) is a problem understanding and/or using language. From an early age, children with DLD will have difficulty using language when they talk or understand other people's talk despite normal intelligence and opportunity. Most cases of DLD do not have a known cause.



Developmental Language Disorder in Children

- DLD is a hidden disability.
- DLD is not caused by a neurological problem or lack of exposure to language
- Children with DLD make more errors or use simpler sentences or even have trouble organizing a conversation.
- DLD emerges in early childhood but persists into adulthood.
- DLD is common. Approximately 1 in 14 children have DLD
- DLD is a life-long condition that impairs social and academic functions.

Symptoms of Developmental Language Disorder

Difficulties are often picked up during childhood, although a teenager or adult can be diagnosed with DLD. Children with DLD may:

- **struggle to find the words to express ideas.**
- **have trouble organising sentences, having conversations, or telling a story.**
- **find it hard to understand words, follow instructions or answer questions.**
- **not remember what someone has said.**
- **have difficulty with behavior and paying attention.**
- **have difficulty reading and writing.**



How is Developmental Language disorder diagnosed?

DLD is best diagnosed by a Speech-Language Therapist. It is a diagnosis based on behaviors, not brain scans or blood tests. DLD is not usually diagnosed before age 5 years, at a time when the child's language system is well established. Typically, the speech-language pathologist will assess the child's interest in communicating and the ability of the child to understand and express words and sentences. The SLT administers a battery of language tests and compares the child's performance to that of other children the same age in the normative sample. The functional impact of any language difficulty should also be assessed through observations of social interactions, considerations of academic achievement, and interviewing the individual or the family. A combination of low performance on the tests and evidence that the low language abilities are causing problems in everyday life can lead to a diagnosis of DLD.

Treatment of Developmental Language Disorder

Early diagnosis of DLD is important and can help to improve long-term outcomes. Children with DLD will benefit from individualised intervention delivered by a speech-language therapist. With the right support and intervention children with DLD can improve skills like vocabulary, narrative discourse, comprehension, and phonological awareness. Your speech therapist will also support parents and teachers. They will suggest ideas and strategies that will help the child with DLD to reduce the impact of their communication difficulties at home and in the classroom.

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