

Introduction

What is *DLD and Me*?

The notion of normality and the identification of problems have potentially harmful effects on children's sense of identity. It seems that the children are protected from these by the existence of alternative ways of seeing themselves- for example by emphasizing their strengths, the ordinariness of their difficulties, and their potential to progress.

-Merrick and Roulstone (*Children's View of Communication and Speech-Language Pathology*, 2011)

DLD and Me is a practical workbook for young people with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) and the professionals supporting them. Through celebrating their strengths and understanding their difficulties, students become experts in themselves and discover how they can share this knowledge with others.

The book grew out of the authors' experiences working in schools with children who had a diagnosis of DLD. Hours upon hours of therapy sessions were spent developing their grammar, vocabulary and phonology, but open discussions about *why* the students came to therapy were rare. Having worked with children with autism to help them understand their diagnosis, the authors felt strongly that equivalent resources for language disorder were urgently needed. Two years later, having designed and piloted the programme in several schools across London, *DLD and Me* was finalised.

DLD and Me is based on the principles of self-advocacy and the conviction that understanding difference and disability can empower and support young people. To effectively self-advocate, individuals must:

- know themselves;
- know their needs;
- identify strategies to manage those needs;
- communicate this to others.

These four areas are the pillars of *DLD and Me*, and correspond with the structure of the programme. Through guided discussions, worksheets and home activities, students will





come to understand what their unique qualities are, how language works, what DLD is and how they can ensure their needs are met. We hope you enjoy using it.

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)

Despite its high prevalence (affecting an estimated 7% of 5 year olds), DLD is not yet a term in common parlance. This is partly due to a long-standing lack of consensus about what to call unexplained, persistent language difficulties in children. For years, the term 'Specific Language Impairment' or SLI was widespread, but many found this unsatisfactory due to its implication that no cognitive functions other than language could be affected in the individual. Other terms were also used, confusing parents and diluting research efforts to understand the condition.

To address these inconsistencies, an international panel of experts debated and finally endorsed the term 'Developmental Language Disorder'. DLD refers to a profile of persistent language difficulties that cause functional impairment in everyday life and which are not associated with a known biological cause.

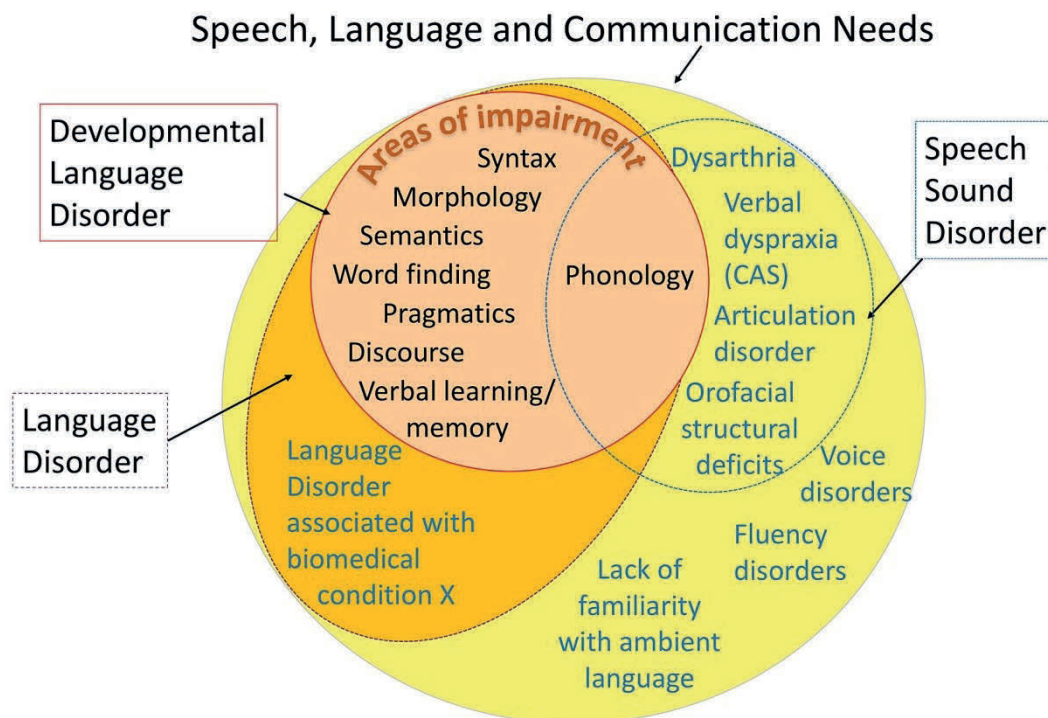
Common questions about DLD

What do people with DLD find hard?

People with DLD may find learning new words hard. They might not be able to express their thoughts clearly, and might get muddled over things like tense and where words should go in a sentence. They might get the sounds in words wrong, or have difficulty with reading and writing. They might not 'get' language-based jokes, and might misunderstand what is said to them.

How does DLD relate to other communication needs?

DLD is a type of communication disorder. The following diagram shows how DLD fits within other speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).



Can you have DLD and other difficulties?

There are some difficulties that can occur alongside DLD. These include difficulties with attention, behaviour, motor skills, literacy, speech, executive functioning and adaptive behaviour. The difficulty may be significant enough to receive a diagnosis of a condition such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, speech sound disorder, dyspraxia or dyslexia.

Some conditions, such as autism, cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, sensorineural hearing loss and brain injury, may cause language difficulties. Because of this, people with these conditions and language difficulties are said to have 'Language Disorder associated with [the other condition]', not DLD.

Can you cure DLD?

People with DLD can make great improvements in their communication, with the help of supportive family, friends and professionals such as speech and language therapists/pathologists and teachers. However, DLD is known to be a long-term condition, and it is likely that people with DLD will continue to find that language does not come easily to them, even into adulthood, with a knock-on impact on other areas of their life.



What is the difference between late talking and DLD?

Some children under the age of 5 may be late in using words and sentences, even though they can understand them. These children are likely to 'catch up' with their peers, so could be described as 'late talkers' in their early years. However, some children under the age of 5 also have significant difficulties understanding language. These difficulties can be harder to identify, but are less likely to spontaneously resolve, and so a diagnosis of DLD would be appropriate. Any child that has language difficulties which persist beyond 5 and a half years old should be considered for a diagnosis of DLD.

What is the impact of DLD?

DLD often results in difficulties with literacy and academic achievement. It can also affect social relationships, independence, employment opportunities, mental health and quality of life. When the right support is in place, many of these risks can be minimised or averted. This is why it is so important for people with DLD and their families to know what support works, and for the wider community to understand what DLD is and what can be done to help.

Outcomes

DLD and Me includes rating scales for students and parents to help evaluate the impact of the intervention. These have been refined since the programme was first piloted to make them more sensitive to change. Initial findings suggest that after completing *DLD and Me*:

- children felt more confident knowing what they were good at and what they found difficult;
- children felt more confident telling their teacher what they found difficult;
- children were better able to explain their language difficulties and how it affected them;
- parents felt more knowledgeable about DLD and more confident in talking to their child about DLD.

Some of the most meaningful outcomes have been things the children have been able to do following the programme:

- At a meeting with staff from her new secondary school, one student informed the head of year that she had DLD so might need some things explaining.

- Inspired by the videos they had seen, three students made a film in which they explored what DLD was and talked about their experience of it.
- Several students have done presentations about DLD to their class, made a wall display for their school or explained DLD to their teacher.



In their own words:

- It has really helped me a lot so now I have not much stuff to worry about.
- I am confident to tell a teacher what I find difficult or what I'm good at.
- I feel more comfortable for secondary.
- I call the teacher and say 'Will you help me?'
- It helps me to use body language, my facial expression, tone of voice so it looks like I'm not rude to other people.
- You really inspired me in DLD ... I know we are doing something special.



Share with your family your sentence that you practiced today...

"I have language difficulties, so it helps me to you show me what to do again."