DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER FACT SHEET · FOR PARENTS

Not listening, or *not understanding?*

A quick guide to **Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)**: what it is, the signs to look for, what helps at home, and what to ask school.

What is DLD?

Long-term difficulties understanding and/or using spoken language, with no known cause. It isn't caused by how much a child has been talked to. Many children with DLD chat happily about things they know well; the difficulty shows when language gets harder.

- Long term
- No known cause
- Affects every language they speak

2 in every class of 30

About 7.6% of children starting school have a language disorder with no known cause.

Norbury et al., 2016

Spot the signs

TICK WHAT YOU NOTICE

- ☐ **Forgets or mixes up instructions** with more than one step
- ☐ **Finds it hard to explain** what happened, or tell a story in order
- ☐ **Struggles to learn new words,** and to remember them next time
- ☐ **Sounds younger than their age:** muddled sentences, missing or wrong words
- ☐ **Reads the words** but can't tell you what the passage meant
- ☐ **Seems anxious, switched off or "naughty"** when a lesson gets wordy

Ticked a few? It could be DLD, something else, or both. Talk to the school's SENCO, and **get a formal assessment from a speech and language therapist**, the professional who can diagnose DLD.

At home: small swaps, big difference

INSTEAD OF "Go upstairs, find your PE kit and put your shoes on."

TRY **One step at a time.** "Find your PE kit." Then: "Now shoes on."

INSTEAD OF "Do you understand?"

TRY "Tell me what you're going to do first." **Check, don't ask.**

INSTEAD OF Jumping in when they pause

TRY **Count to ten in your head.** Thinking time is working time.

INSTEAD OF "No, it's *went*, not *goed*."

TRY **Say it back the right way:** "Yes, you went to the park!"

TAKE THIS TO SCHOOL

Three questions for the SENCO

1. **What have you noticed** about how my child understands and uses language in class?
2. **What support is in place now,** and when will we review whether it's working?
3. **Can my child be discussed** at the next School Link Therapy meeting?

No diagnosis needed. Schools should respond to the need they can see through SEN Support (SEND Code of Practice, 6.27).

In Kent, NHS speech and language therapy referrals for school-age children go through School Link Therapy meetings.

Read the full guide to DLD

Scan the code, or visit withlauren.uk/blog/developmental-language-disorder-dld

For your child's teacher →

TURN OVER

DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER FACT SHEET · FOR TEACHERS AND TAS

10 small changes that *make lessons make sense*

Simple classroom strategies for pupils with **DLD**. They cost nothing, take seconds, and help plenty of other pupils too.

1 Name first
Say the pupil's name before an instruction or question, so you have their attention.

2 One step at a time
Chunk instructions. Give the next step once the first is done.

3 Show it, don't just say it
Visuals, gestures, objects and a short written list on the desk.

4 Wait longer
Give extra thinking time before you expect an answer, or move on.

5 Pre-teach key words
Introduce the topic's key vocabulary before the lesson, with pictures.

6 Check, don't ask
"Show me how you'll start" tells you more than *"Everyone OK?"*

7 Model, don't correct
Repeat what they said back in the correct form, and keep the conversation going.

8 Give sentence starters
Scaffolds like *"I think... because..."* for talking and writing.

9 Fewer words on the board
Cut slide text, highlight the key point, keep task sheets clean.

10 Read behaviour as communication
If they switch off or act up, check what they've understood first.

KNOW THE CODE

What the SEND Code of Practice says

Communication and interaction is one of the four broad areas of need. It includes pupils who have *"difficulty saying what they want to, understanding what is being said to them"* (6.28).

In an EHCP, speech and language therapy *"should normally be recorded as special educational provision"* (9.74).

IN KENT

Getting a therapist involved

NHS speech and language therapy referrals for school-age children go through **School Link Therapy meetings** with Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust, or speak to **Education With Lauren** about a private referral.

Share what you see in class with the SENCO and the family. Specific examples make a referral stronger.

EDUCATION WITH LAUREN

Want the *full picture?*

Our **Gap Analysis Assessment** looks at a child's attainment, learning gaps and barriers to learning, and identifies indicators of speech and language needs alongside dyslexia, ADHD, autism and processing difficulties. With our **School Liaison Service**, it comes with a provision map the class teacher and SENCO can use straight away.

FREE 15-MINUTE CALL

07943 010892

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This fact sheet is general information, not a diagnosis, and not legal advice. If you're worried about a child's language, talk to the school's SENCO or a speech and language therapist. Sources: Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, DLD information for parents and school staff; Norbury et al. (2016), *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*; Bishop et al. (2017), CATALISE; DfE & DoH, *SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years* (2015), paras 6.27, 6.28, 9.74; Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust, children's therapies referral. © 2026 Education With Lauren. Free to print and share. Version: October 2026.