

Developmental Language Disorder: A hidden yet common condition

by Katelyn Mansfield, Speech-Language Pathologist

Roughly one out of 15 students have a Development Language Disorder (DLD). DLD is a term used to describe difficulties understanding and using spoken language in children who are otherwise developing typically. It is five times more prevalent than Autism Spectrum Disorder yet it can go undetected.

Language is crucial for social-emotional wellbeing, social connectedness, and academic

DLD can vary from student to student, making it hard to detect. However, there are some shared commonalities that could indicate an underlying language problem. These may include:

- Difficulty following multistep spoken directions.
- Difficulty using proper grammar (e.g. 'I playing' for 'I am playing').
- Difficulty learning new words (vocabulary) or knowing fewer words than their peers.

and using language. If a language difficulty is identified, an SLP can work collaboratively to highlight areas of need and support. Through ongoing consultation with members of the student's educational team, instructional strategies and practices can be implemented to ensure consistency and access across a wide-range of educational supports.

Language is deeply entwined in all aspects of education. This can make



attainment. It permeates all aspects of education. For this reason, when a student experiences language difficulties, it can pose significant challenges. DLD is associated with increased risk for dyslexia and other learning disabilities. Estimates suggest that students with DLD are six times more likely to experience literacy difficulties, are four times more likely to experience math difficulties, and are at risk for behavioural and social-emotional challenges. Because DLD can be overlooked, difficulties may be attributed to factors such as poor behaviour, poor listening or inattention.

As school-based professionals, we know early identification is crucial to ensure students are adequately supported before they fall behind. The challenges experienced by those with

- Difficulty using language in social situations. Students may have difficulty sharing information or stories, staying on topic or taking turns during conversation.
- Difficulty with reading, writing or spelling.

If you are concerned about a student's progress, academically, socially, or behaviorally, it is important to consult with your school-based team, which includes a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP). SLPs have specialized training in the prevention, assessment, diagnosis and treatment of language difficulties. If a language difficulty is suspected, an assessment will be recommended.

A comprehensive assessment is an important first step to identify whether a student's difficulties can be attributed to a problem understanding

it difficult for those who have an identified (or unidentified) difficulty understanding and using language. Collaboration among all school-based professionals can ensure that students with DLD are engaged and can meaningfully participate in their learning.

To learn more about Developmental Language Disorders and the role of SLPs, you can visit: <https://www.sac-oac.ca/public/>.

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