



SPEECH, LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION NEEDS (SLCN)

# Developmental Language Disorder

DLD is a lifelong neurodevelopmental difference involving significant, persistent difficulty understanding and/or using spoken language that is not explained by another condition. SLCN is the broader umbrella it sits within.

**i** DLD replaced older terms such as 'specific language impairment'. When language difficulty occurs alongside another condition (e.g. autism or hearing loss) it is called 'language disorder associated with X'. DLD is common but often a **hidden** difficulty.

## **i** How it can present

- Understanding spoken language and processing what is said
- Word-finding – knowing a word but not retrieving it
- Grammar and sentence structure
- Following longer or multi-step instructions
- Telling and sequencing stories or explaining ideas
- Learning and using new vocabulary

## **✓** What helps – supportive approaches

- ✓ Speech and language therapy – strategies for the child and the adults around them
- ✓ Reduce the language load – short, clear sentences, one idea at a time
- ✓ Give extra processing and thinking time
- ✓ Visual supports – pictures, symbols, gesture, visual timetables
- ✓ Pre-teach and revisit key vocabulary
- ✓ Check understanding by asking the child to show or explain back

## **📍** UK CONTEXT

~7%

About 7% of children have DLD – around 2 children in every classroom of 30. It is common but under-recognised.

*Speech and Language UK / RADLD*

## **✦** Strengths often seen

- ✦ Visual, practical and hands-on skills
- ✦ Creativity and rich ideas – often more than they can put into words
- ✦ Problem-solving and nonverbal reasoning
- ✦ Determination, persistence and resilience
- ✦ Warmth in friendships, play and shared activities

## **📍** Finding assessment & support in the UK

- 1 Talk to your GP, health visitor or your child's school SENCo
- 2 NHS Children's Speech and Language Therapy (referral routes vary; some areas self-refer)
- 3 School SEN Support (an 'assess-plan-do-review' cycle)
- 4 Request an EHC needs assessment / EHCP where needs are greater
- 5 Speech and Language UK and Afasic offer information and a helpline

**Please note** – this sheet provides general information only. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not a substitute for individual assessment or professional advice. Every person is unique; if you have concerns about yourself or a child, please speak with a suitably qualified professional.

**Sources & further information:** RCSLT · Speech and Language UK · Afasic · RADLD · NHS