



What can educators do to help children who struggle with oral language skills?

1. Look for signs of DLD in children in your class and consult with a speech-language pathologist if you have any concerns

A child with DLD may:

- Not talk as much as other children
- Use immature language
- Struggle to think of certain words (word-finding difficulties)
- Have difficulty with words that have more than one meaning
- Not understand or remember what is being said to them
- Have difficulty categorizing and manipulating sounds.
 - For example: a child may be unable to identify the three phonemes in the word 'dog', or recognize that 'dog' and 'Dad' begin with the same phoneme
- Provide too much or too little information to a conversation
- Be insensitive to social cues
- Be over-literal and have difficulty understanding figurative language
- Have difficulty telling a story that makes sense to listeners.
 - For example: ideas in the story may appear disconnected and hard to follow
- Have difficulty remembering sequences of sounds or words over short term (verbal short-term memory difficulties)

(adapted from Bishop et al., 2017)

Note: Developmental Language Disorder can only be diagnosed by experts like Speech-Language Pathologists. However, by recognizing the signs of DLD, educators can connect students and their families with the appropriate supports and services.

2. Make small adjustments to your teaching that better support students with language impairments

Some easy to implement changes can be represented by the acronym S.M.A.R.T (adapted from (Mentrasti, 2019)

S

SLOW DOWN

Slowing down your rate of speech can help provide children with DLD more time to process what you are saying. If you speak too quickly, these children are more likely to miss important information.

M

(E)MPHASIZE

Emphasizing key points in your message will help cue children with DLD to the most critical words in your instructions.

A

ADD VISUALS

Adding visual cues in the form of gestures or pictures can provide children with DLD hints to help them understand your messages.

R

REPEAT INSTRUCTIONS

Repeating instructions two or three times has been shown to be highly beneficial for children with DLD.

T

TIME TO RESPOND

Children with DLD often need extra time not only to process messages, but also to craft a response. Providing more time to give an answer can allow them to better formulate and deliver an answer.

Other strategies to support students with language impairments include:

- Introduce and highlight key vocabulary before starting a new unit
- Encourage oral participation
- Restate key points
- Provide opportunities for students to signal they have not understood something
- Provide multimodal learning and assessment opportunities (e.g. Through verbal instructions, written words, pictures, diagrams, videos, and hands-on activities with concrete objects)
- Provide scaffolding as much as possible
- Collaborate with your student's speech-language pathologist
- Consider ways of reducing the cognitive load by minimizing distractions

3. Help increase awareness of DLD

Despite it being more common than many widely known childhood conditions such as autism spectrum disorder and ADHD, awareness of DLD remains alarmingly low. You can help raise awareness about DLD by:

- Sharing this article and tip sheet with your fellow educators
- Learning more about DLD by visiting:
 - Supporting Developmental Language Disorders in the Classroom – Youtube Video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKegRIHFqH4>)
 - Raising Awareness for Development Language Disorder (RADLD) Campaign (<https://radld.org>)
 - DLD and Me (<https://dldandme.org>)

References

Bishop, D. V. M., Snowling, M. J., Thompson, P. A., Greenhalgh, T., & and the CATALISE-2 consortium. (2017). Phase 2 of CATALISE: A multinational and multidisciplinary Delphi consensus study of problems with language development: Terminology. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 58(10), 1068–1080. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12721>

Mentrasti, A. (2019, March 26). Shareable Strategies for Working With Preschool Children With DLD. *The Asha Wire*. <https://leader.pubs.asha.org/doi/10.1044/shareable-strategies-for-working-with-preschool-children-with-dld/full/>