



# Understanding Developmental Language Disorder

Children with Developmental Language Disorder are as able and healthy as other children. With one exception, they have great difficulty thinking about, understanding and using language. They are often as intelligent as other children their age, but still have difficulties with language. There may be no outward signs of disability and no obvious physical indicators of a problem. For this reason, Developmental Language Disorder is also known as a 'hidden disability' affecting 1 in 14 children.

A child with Developmental Language Disorder can be creative and eager to learn, but struggle to learn new words and follow instructions. They may have lots of ideas, but find it hard to put sentences together to communicate what they are thinking. Developmental Language Disorder presents in different ways for each child and can be difficult to understand, because the exact cause is unknown. We do know the speech and language part of the brain develops differently to others and Developmental Language Disorder can run in families.

Having a Developmental Language Disorder has a significant impact on the life of the child, including:

- Learning the meaning of words and how words are related.
- Using grammar and structuring sentences correctly.
- Understanding the rules of conversations and social interactions.
- Reading, writing and numeracy skills, as well as listening and learning in class.



Some disabilities look like this

Some look like this

These challenges can often lead to frustration, social difficulties and behaviour problems. Furthermore, many individuals with Developmental Language Disorder may also have a range of associated difficulties affecting access and participation in the classroom, at home and within the community.

In addition to difficulties with language, other developmental domains may also be affected, including:



Cognition



Sensory



Motor



Perceptual



Social/Emotional

Please refer to the SALDA handout 'Foundations for Learning' for more information.





For many years, there has been a lack of agreement regarding how best to describe children with language difficulties. It has been called a wide variety of terms, such as specific language impairment, speech language impairment, childhood aphasia and language delay. The figure below outlines the current recommended terminology for speech, language and communication needs. The term Language Disorder describes children with language difficulties, which significantly impact their everyday life. Language Disorder (pink circle) can co-occur with other conditions, such as Autism, Intellectual Disability and Down Syndrome. Developmental Language Disorder (white circle) is recommended to be used for cases of Language Disorder with no other co-occurring conditions. Under the umbrella of communication (blue circle), children can also present with speech (green circle), voice or fluency disorders, or may have a lack of familiarity with the local language. These can occur in isolation or co-occur with Developmental Language Disorder.

### Speech, Language & Communication Needs

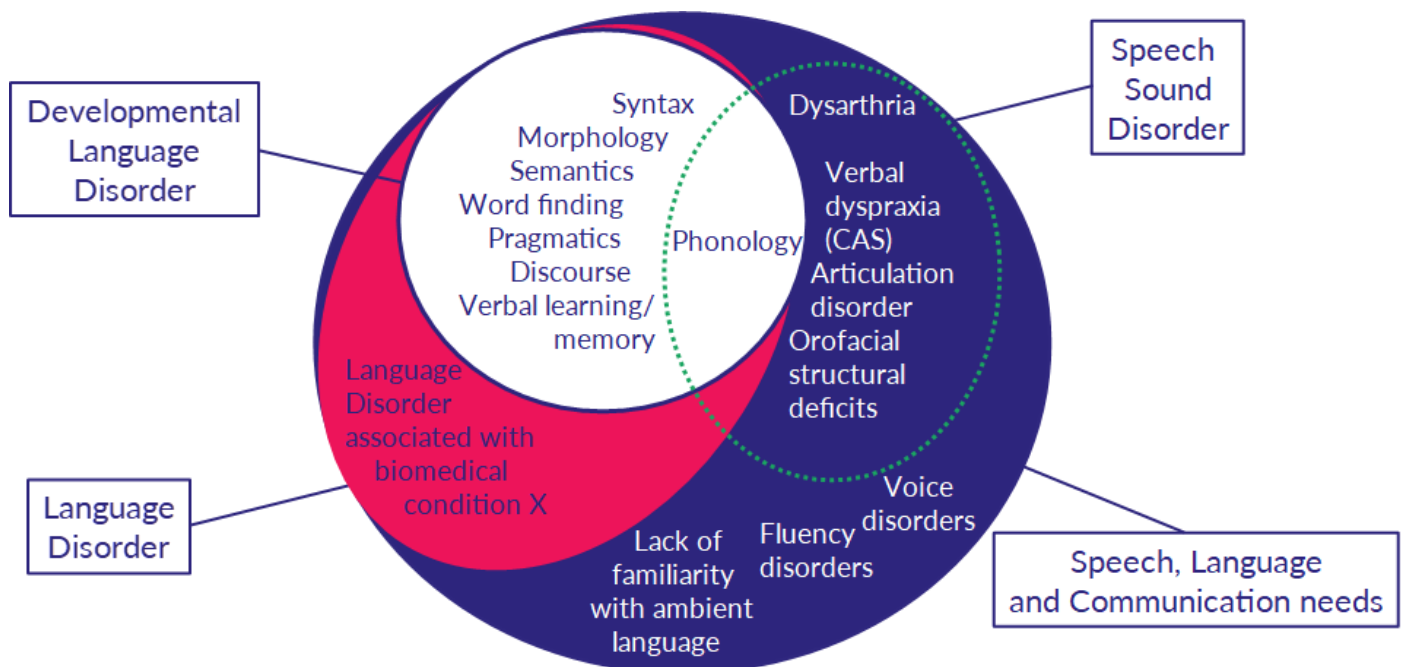


Figure 1. Venn diagram illustrating the relationship between different speech and language terminology (Bishop et al., 2017).

#### What should I do if I suspect a child has Developmental Language Disorder?

Developmental Language Disorder occurs for many reasons. Consultation with a speech language pathologist is essential to determine whether the child has the disorder. The child may also need to undergo further assessments with other allied health professionals. A paediatrician can also assist in diagnosing and/or excluding other developmental disorders.

Bishop, D. V. M., Snowling, M. J., Thompson, P. A., Greenhalgh, T., & the CATALISE Consortium. (2017). CATALISE: a multinational and multidisciplinary Delphi consensus study of problems with language development. Phase 2. Terminology. *PeerJ Preprints*, 5, e2484v2482. doi:10.7287/peerj.preprints.2484v2

