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Empowering young people with

DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER (DLD)

By **Becky Clark**, director of ClarkSLT, RADLD co-founder, Fellow of RCSLT

For young people with DLD, the relevance of developing core language skills cannot be underestimated. Understanding key words, using basic grammar to convey a clear message, understanding the language of time and using narrative skills to retell experiences are all key abilities for learning and everyday life.

Targeting these foundational skills are important; however, communication is complex and impacts of DLD are wide ranging. Language

processing difficulties are persistent and with age, the demands of spoken and written language increase. Subject-specific vocabulary increases exponentially and tasks rely more heavily on interpreting ambiguous language and expressing abstract/complex ideas. Beyond school, those with DLD can experience ongoing barriers with spoken and written language at work, within work, social settings and independent living activities.

So, what – beyond linguistics skills – should we be prioritising to support?





Communication strategies

For successful communication and language learning, explicit awareness of strategies is also crucial. By developing an awareness and providing practice, children with DLD can consciously select from the tools available.

APPROACHES

Modelling

- Say when you find communication challenging, e.g., "That didn't make sense to me, it was too much information"
- 'Think out loud' to highlight strategies in real time, e.g., "I'm going to read that again slowly"; "I can't remember what it's called, I'll describe it"

Explicit focus

- Explore different strategies that everyone can use when words are confusing or something is hard to explain

Practice

- Use fun activities to provide opportunities for the student to practise the specific target
- Consider opportunities for the student to try the strategy in different situations. Discuss subtle prompts that would be useful and acceptable to them within the classroom

Environment

- Reinforce with the whole class that seeking clarification is a strength
- Provide age-appropriate visual reminders for the whole class, encouraging use of communication strategies



Self Awareness

Understanding their own profile can support students with DLD to make sense of their daily language challenges, support their self-image and support their view of themselves as a learner.

APPROACHES

Validating differences

- Educate all students about differences in how we learn and communicate and relate these to wider concepts of diversity
- Provide opportunities for staff and students to talk about their own differences to the students

Understanding of themselves

- Support the students with DLD to understand their strengths as well as the difficulties they experience with language. See the '**DLD and Me**' website www.dldandme.co.uk

- Parental involvement is essential, along with a sensitive, individualised approach. Adjust the content and the timing of steps to take account of the young person's readiness to take on board information and the questions they ask

Families

- Offer DLD related discussion sessions for parents/carers including how to talk about their child's language difficulties at home
- Signpost to free '**DLD Together**' courses offered by Afasic: www.afasic.org.uk and NAPLIC: www.naplic.org.uk



Self-Advocacy

Students with DLD need support to develop confidence to use strategies, and to express their views, needs and preferences. These self-advocacy skills are important for their wellbeing both at school and in the future.

APPROACHES

Direct teaching

- Teach the concept of self-advocacy using simple language and real examples or video clips
- Support the young person to explain DLD or to describe their challenges with talking and understanding in their own way

Media representation

- Analyse media with characters who have

difficulties understanding and talking and create character profiles with the strategies they use

- See for example **RADLD** video clips: www.youtube.com/RADLD. Students could create their own stories about DLD
- Support the student to create art, poetry or short films about their strengths and their challenges with language

Summary

DLD interventions should combine a balanced and individualised focus on **skills, strategies, self-awareness** and **self-advocacy**. Furthermore, whole class conversations about language and communication differences are important as this both aids the individual's understanding of

their own daily challenges and increases peer acceptance of their differences. Empowerment through developing insight into personal profiles, reducing camouflaging behaviours and improving the wellbeing outcomes for individuals with DLD should be high on our agenda.



ClarkSLT provides speech and language therapy support for young people in SE England with communication differences, including DLD. For more information visit: www.clarkslt.co.uk