

Developmental Language Disorder and Dyslexia

Understanding the overlap between spoken language, reading and spelling

Many children who struggle with reading and spelling also have difficulties with spoken language. Developmental Language Disorder (DLD, which can also be referred to as expressive and receptive language delays) and dyslexia are different conditions, but they can overlap because reading and spelling are built on language skills.

What is DLD?

- DLD affects how a child understands and/or uses spoken language.
- The difficulty is not explained by hearing loss, brain injury or limited exposure to language.
- DLD can affect instructions, vocabulary, grammar, storytelling, conversation and learning.

What is dyslexia?

- Dyslexia affects accurate and/or fluent word reading and spelling.
- Students may have difficulty with decoding, word recognition, spelling patterns and reading fluency.
- Dyslexia is language-based and often involves weaknesses in phonological and/or orthographic processing.

How are DLD and dyslexia connected?

Language foundation

Reading and spelling are built on spoken language skills, including speech sounds, vocabulary, grammar and sentence meaning.

Phonological skills

Both conditions can involve difficulty noticing, remembering and manipulating sounds in words.

Comprehension

A child with DLD may decode words but still struggle to understand longer sentences, vocabulary and text meaning.

Co-occurrence

Some children have both DLD and dyslexia. Literacy instruction may need to address both word-level skills and broader language comprehension.

Key idea: Dyslexia is primarily seen in word reading and spelling; DLD is primarily seen in spoken language. A student may have one or both.

Signs and Support

Signs families and teachers may notice

Oral language signs	Reading and spelling signs	Learning impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty following instructions • Trouble finding words or explaining ideas • Short or jumbled sentences • Difficulty retelling events or stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow, effortful decoding • Guessing from the first letter or picture • Poor spelling despite practice • Difficulty remembering words previously taught 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced confidence • Avoidance of reading or writing tasks • Difficulty understanding classroom language • Repeated explanations or extra processing time needed

What support can help?

<p>1. Identify the profile</p> <p>Find out whether the student is mainly having difficulty with word reading/spelling, oral language, or both.</p>	<p>2. Teach explicitly</p> <p>Teach sounds, letters, spelling patterns, syllables, morphemes, vocabulary and sentence meaning in a clear sequence.</p>
<p>3. Build language and literacy together</p> <p>Support word reading as well as vocabulary, grammar, comprehension and written expression.</p>	<p>4. Make learning cumulative</p> <p>Revisit skills often so students develop accuracy, automaticity and confidence.</p>
<p>5. Reduce language load</p> <p>Use clear instructions, visuals, vocabulary pre-teaching, extra processing time and checks for understanding.</p>	<p>6. Collaborate when needed</p> <p>Speech pathologists, psychologists, schools and structured literacy practitioners may all contribute support.</p>

How O-G Reading Clinic can support students

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Identify underlying reading and spelling needs ✓ Teach structured literacy in a systematic sequence ✓ Build decoding, spelling, fluency and word knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Support vocabulary, morphology and comprehension as students progress ✓ Adjust teaching to age, profile and stage of learning ✓ Recommend further assessment/referral when broader language needs are suspected
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With the right teaching and supports, students can make meaningful progress.