

# Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

## Understanding Developmental Language Disorder

by Mary Lowery, M.S., CCC-SLP

### What is Developmental Language Disorder?

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) is a common communication disorder that affects how children learn, understand, and use language. It can impact speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Since the signs of DLD aren't always easy to spot, it's often referred to as a "hidden condition."



### Key Facts About DLD

- DLD affects about 1 in 14 children, making it one of the most common developmental disorders.
- DLD is a lifelong disorder, with language difficulties continuing into adulthood. The effects can impact education, work, and social life.
- It may also be known as: Specific Language Impairment (SLI), Language Delay, or Developmental Dysphasia.



### Signs of Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)

DLD can look different in each person who has it, and the signs may change as the person grows. A child with language difficulties may mistakenly be seen as having behavior issues. For example, a child who doesn't follow directions or becomes frustrated when misunderstood may be seen as disobedient. It is important to determine if a language disorder is present in children who are having difficulty at home or at school. Knowing the signs of DLD can help make this determination.

### In Younger Children, Signs of DLD May Include:

- Meeting spoken language milestones later than their peers
- Trouble learning new words and putting words together into sentences
- Difficulty having conversations
- Difficulty following directions
- Frequent mistakes with grammar



### What Causes DLD?

DLD is a neurodevelopmental disorder, meaning it starts in childhood and affects the way the brain develops. The difficulties associated with DLD are not caused by other conditions like hearing loss, head injury, autism, or lack of exposure to language. While the exact cause of DLD is unknown, it likely has a genetic basis.

- DLD often runs in families — 50–70% of children with DLD have a family member with similar language difficulties.
- Related conditions like dyslexia or autism may also be more common in the families of children with DLD.



# Handy Handouts®

Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students  
(cont.)

## In Older Children and Adults, Signs of DLD May Include:

- Limited use of longer or more complex sentences
- Struggling to find the right words when speaking
- Trouble understanding jokes, idioms, or figurative language
- Challenges with reading, writing, and spelling
- Difficulty telling a detailed story in a logical sequence



DLD is a common yet often overlooked condition that can significantly affect a child's ability to communicate, learn, and connect with others. Early identification is best, but starting treatment at any age can be helpful. If you suspect your child may be struggling with language, seeking support from a speech-language pathologist can make a big difference. With the right help and support, children with DLD can improve their language skills at home, in school, and beyond.

### Related Handy Handouts®:

[15 – Early Language Development](#)

[44 – Make Learning Language Practical, Easy and FUN!](#)

[120 – Promoting Oral Language Development in Young Children](#)

### Resources:

"Developmental Language Disorder." Cleveland Clinic. August 09, 2024. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/developmental-language-disorder-dld>

"Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) Information." The DLD Project. Retrieved September 2, 2025 from <https://thedldproject.com/developmental-language-disorder-dld/>

"Developmental Language Disorder." National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. May 8, 2023. <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/developmental-language-disorder>

For more FREE Handy Handouts®, go to [www.handyhandouts.com](http://www.handyhandouts.com)