

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)



What is DLD?

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), previously known as Specific Language Impairment (SLI), makes it more difficult for people to use and understand language.

Underdiagnosed in the UK, approximately two children in every classroom will have DLD. The condition is diagnosed in individuals who have language difficulties but do not have other conditions which may have contributed to them (e.g. hearing loss, autism or learning disability). An individual with DLD may have difficulty:

- Learning new words and 'finding' the words they wish to use.
- Expressing themselves clearly. They may struggle to organise their sentences to form a clear narrative.
- Understanding instructions and processing verbal information.
- Reading and writing.

These difficulties can make it challenging for a person to engage with education and build positive friendships. These symptoms and their consequences can persist into adulthood.

Impacts on communication

Developmental Language Disorder is likely to have a marked impact upon your client's ability to follow verbal information and express themselves clearly

in [legal conferences](#) and [hearings](#). They may:

- Struggle to retain the meaning of new legal terminology they encounter, even when this is explained simply.
- Have difficulty processing verbal information (e.g. legal advice, or evidence in court).
- Have difficulty expressing themselves with clarity when giving instructions and giving evidence.
- Have a limited expressive vocabulary, making it more difficult to give detailed accounts.
- Have difficulty sequencing narratives.
- Provide narratives which change between retellings.
- Not reliably understand questions put to them in conference or during their evidence.
- Have difficulty drawing inference (reading between the lines), and may appear naïve.
- Have difficulty engaging effectively in social interactions.
- Have emotional management or attention difficulties when they struggle to follow or understand language used during proceedings.
- Struggle to read and understand case documents and take their own notes of proceedings.

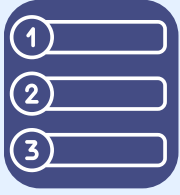
Communication tips



Use simple words, avoiding specialist terminology.



When specialist terminology is unavoidable, **explain it in simple terms each time**. Do not expect your client to retain these definitions.



Break information into short chunks.



Use short sentences. Imagine speaking in 'bullet points' and pause at the end of each sentence.



Summarise the information you have provided at the end of each topic.



Do not rush. Allow ample time for your client to take in information and formulate their response.



Take regular breaks from processing language in conferences and court which will be particularly effortful for people with DLD.



Use visual resources to support understanding of more complex information, e.g. diagrams, mind maps, drawings and flowcharts.



Check your client's understanding with comprehension questions like, "What did the judge decide?". Do not simply ask, "Do you understand?".

Facts & statistics

7.5%

of children in the UK are estimated to have DLD (*Norbury et al, 2016*)

up to 60%

of young people who commit crimes have DLD (*Winstanley et al, 2020*)

2x

Young people with DLD are twice as likely to reoffend than those who do not have the condition (*Winstanley et al, 2020*)

Sources

Norbury, C. F., Gooch, D., Wray, C., Baird, G., Charman, T., Simonoff, E., Vamvakas, G., & Pickles, A. (2016). *The impact of nonverbal ability on prevalence and clinical presentation of language disorder: evidence from a population study*. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry* 57(11), 1247–1257.

Winstanley, M., Webb, R. T., Conti-Ramsden, G. (2020) *Developmental language disorders and risk of recidivism among young offenders*. *The Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry* 62: 396-403.



Further reading

- The Advocate's Gateway - [Toolkit 5: Planning to Question Someone with 'Hidden Disabilities'](#)
- [Developmental language disorders and risk of recidivism among young offenders](#) (Winstanley et al, 2020)
- [The impact of developmental language disorder in a defendant's description on mock jurors' perceptions and judgements](#) (Hobson et al, 2022)
- Communicourt blog: [DLD: A hidden difficulty in legal proceedings](#) (2023)

From The Access Brief

- [How to create visual aids](#)
- [Receptive vs. expressive communication](#)
- [Supporting expressive language](#)
- [How to check understanding](#)
- [Intermediary assessments](#)

About RADLD



RADLD (Raising Awareness of Developmental Language Disorder) is a charity which works to improve awareness and understanding of Developmental Language Disorder.

Alongside raising awareness and growing an international network of global DLD advocates, the organisation seeks to disseminate evidence based information and signpost to further reliable resources.

The RADLD website contains helpful [factsheets](#), [open access research](#) and signposting to [further information](#) and support. You can support the work of RADLD by [donating to the charity](#).

Intermediary services

If you are concerned about your client's ability to communicate effectively and participate in legal proceedings, Communicourt can help.

We will assess your client to understand their communication needs and how these might affect them in court. Your client does not need to have a diagnosis. Our reports will identify any particular communication issues and make bespoke recommendations to help you and your client throughout proceedings.

If intermediary assistance is recommended, one of our highly trained intermediaries can be there throughout proceedings to facilitate those recommendations.

Intermediaries are mostly funded by HMCTS, with no charges or payments required by legal representatives.

How to book an intermediary

- 1 Refer online.** Refer your client for an assessment through [our online portal](#) (5 minutes).
- 2 Funding.** We send a quote for you to send to Legal Aid / HMCTS to approve (24 hours).
- 3 Book assessment.** Once funding is approved, please let us know. We will schedule an assessment (2-6 weeks).
- 4 Assessment will** take up to 3 hours and can be conducted in person or remotely. You will then receive a report (7 days).
- 5 Book dates** for hearings or conferences. We will send you booking forms to be signed by the court. Once signed, we will book the intermediary.