

# Could it be Language?

Identifying and Supporting Children with Developmental Language Disorder in the Classroom



Dr Susan Ebbels, Hilary Nicoll, Sue Marr  
Moor House Research and Training Institute

## What is Developmental Language Disorder?

- Difficulty talking and/or understanding language
- Persists beyond 5 years
- Impacts on education and social interactions
- Frequently impacts mental health

**2 CHILDREN  
IN EVERY  
CLASSROOM**

HAVE DEVELOPMENTAL  
LANGUAGE DISORDER

"Greatly at risk of academic difficulties"

4 x Maths

6 x Spelling

Young et al.,  
2002

6 x Reading

12 x ALL THREE

Yew &  
o'Kearney,  
2013

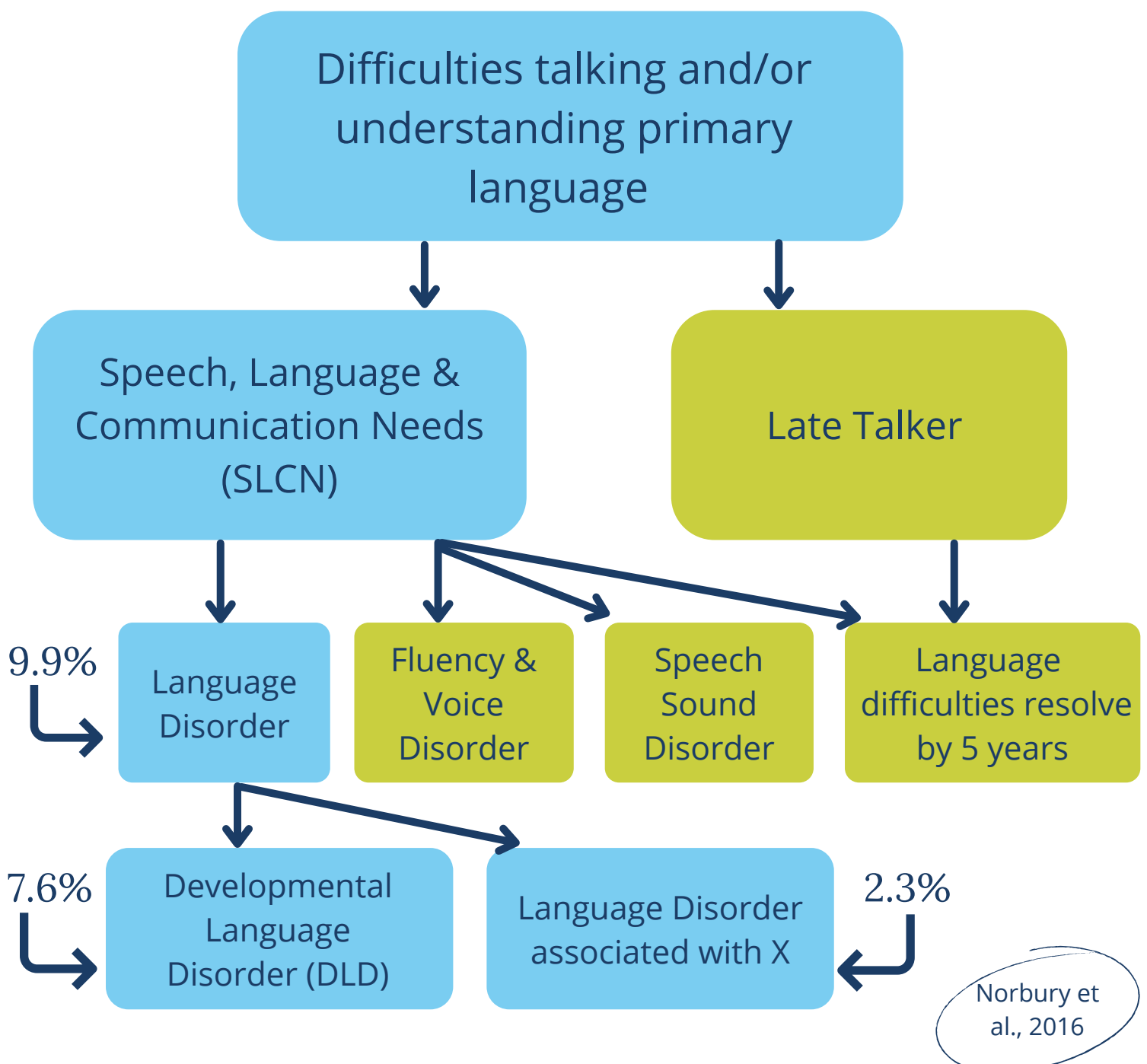
"2 x more likely to have an adverse mental health outcome"

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## DLD vs SLCN



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## Signs of Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)

### 1. Processing Language

Listening to, remembering, understanding what others say

- Listening intently but not understanding the content of your lessons or the message behind what they read?
- Understanding something in the moment, but not able to apply understanding later or recall it the following day?



### 2. Following Instructions

Especially if long or containing abstract concepts/complex vocabulary

- Frequently carrying out tasks in the wrong order?
- Only carrying out half an instruction or just the last thing you said?
- Asking 'what?' after you've just explained exactly what they need to do?



### 3. Vocabulary

Understanding and using words accurately

- Struggling to recall key words of the day?
- Mixing up words like 'pigeon' and 'penguin'?
- Using 'stuff' and 'thingy' often, as they can't remember the proper term?
- Struggling to remember the names of places they've been, films they've watched or people they know?



### 4. Grammar

Understanding and using grammar (spoken and written), getting words in the correct order with the correct tense

- Misunderstanding who did what to whom in stories?
- Only using strings of key words for sentences without using tense or other grammatical markers like pronouns and plurals?



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## Signs of Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)

### 5. Expressing Ideas

Saying how they feel, telling a story, explaining their ideas

- Getting frustrated when trying to describe how they feel or tell you what they've done?
- Using much shorter sentences than their peers?
- Keep restarting or reformulating their sentences but never quite getting to the point?



### 6. Asking and Answering Questions

May not talk much in class discussions

- Reticent to ask questions or to volunteer answers?
- Repeating someone else's question when it's their turn or using safe questions every time?
- Staying quiet in small group work?



### 7. Maths

Particularly with word problems and topics with a heavy language load

- Finding difficulty understanding questions with lots of words?
- Struggling to understand or remember the language for time, space, measures, shape and place?



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## Signs of Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)

### 8. Reading

Understanding what is happening in a story/narrative/text

- Finding it hard to understand what they have read?
- Reading a word and a related word comes out instead e.g. reading 'tripod' but saying 'triangle?'
- Stop reading at the end of a line instead of at the full stop?



### 9. Literacy

Understanding and using sounds for spelling and reading (phonological awareness)

- Spelling words like 'there' and 'their' correctly but unsure which to use?
- Written work spelled correctly and beautifully presented but disorganised in structure?



### 10. Social Interaction

Using language in social situations/making and maintaining friendships

- Adults stepping in to facilitate play or resolve conflicts more often when this child is involved with peers?
- Getting upset with peers when they change the rules, or peers getting upset with them for 'ruining the game?'



If a child in your class is presenting with any of these warning signs, it is worth asking yourself, '**Could it be language?**'

The more of these signs you can attribute to the child, the more pressing it is that the child be referred to a speech and language therapist and assessed for DLD.

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## How Can You Support a Child with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) in the Classroom?

- Let the child with DLD know what their question is in advance, to allow them time to think and form an answer
- Always have a 'don't know' or 'don't understand' answer to questions

- Deliberately leave time for thinking before taking answers
- Allow paired talk with a partner before answering

### Whole Class Thinking Time

- Control thinking and answering time using a visual system e.g. traffic lights (amber for thinking, green for answers)

- Create an ethos in the classroom of allowing all children time to think and process

- Use visual timetables to help with time management and organisation
- Use a consistent symbol system to add pictures to text to support understanding and aid memory

- Use real life objects to support learning
- Take photos during practical activities to use later to support talking writing, memory and vocabulary

### Visual Support

- Use multimedia resources
- Use visual cues like themed borders on worksheets

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## How Can You Support a Child with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) in the Classroom?

- Start with what the child knows already
- Signpost the fact it is a new word
- Once they understand it, use the word in different contexts

A child with DLD needs three times the number of repetitions to learn a new word than a child with typically developing language. Reduce key vocabulary list down to a third of the number of words

### Learning New Words

- Plan in time at the start of each lesson to review and learn key words
- Use examples the child is familiar with to explain abstract words

- Use a word wall and word of the week to focus on key vocabulary
- Talk around the word, count the syllables, clap it out and find a 'hook' to help them remember it

- Be careful when using idioms and metaphors as these are confusing e.g. 'playing with fire'
- Use literal language

### Modify Your Language

- Insert pauses into instructions to give the child time to assimilate the information and carry out the task
- Repeat key information often

- Be mindful of using 'before,' 'after,' 'if,' 'when,' 'until' and 'unless' particularly in instructions
- Use 3 short, simple sentences instead of one long, complex one

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## Useful Links

### Visual Support

- Widgit symbol system - <https://www.widgitonline.com>
- The SHAPE CODING system - <https://www.shapecoding.com>
- Clicker - <https://www.cricksoft.com/uk/clicker/8>
- Makaton symbols - [https://makaton.org/TMC/News\\_Stories/News/Sign\\_and\\_Symbol\\_Downloads](https://makaton.org/TMC/News_Stories/News/Sign_and_Symbol_Downloads)
- Nesy - <https://www.nesy.com/uk/>

### Multisensory Learning

- Numicon - <https://global.oup.com/education/content/primary/series/numicon>
- Lis'n Tell - <https://www.lisntell.co.uk/>
- Talk for Writing - Pie Corbett - <https://www.talk4writing.com>
- Makaton Sign Language - <https://www.makaton.org/>
- Sounds for Literacy Cued Articulation <https://www.soundsforliteracy.co.uk/cued-articulation.html>

### General Developmental Language Disorder Support

- Raising Awareness of Developmental Language Disorder (RADLD) - <https://radld.org/>
  - AFASIC - Voice For Life - <https://www.afasic.org.uk/>
  - Lily Farrington Animation Explaining DLD - [https://youtu.be/rwOfkj0dj\\_0](https://youtu.be/rwOfkj0dj_0)
  - National Association of Professionals concerned with Language Impaired Children (NAPLIC) - <https://www.naplic.org.uk/>
  - DLD - What Every Class Teacher Needs to Know - <https://www.moorhouseschool.co.uk/dld-classteacher>
  - DLD - A Guide For Parents - <https://www.moorhouseschool.co.uk/dld-parents>
  - Signs of DLD for Teachers and Parents Short Films and Information Sheets - <https://www.moorhouseschool.co.uk/dld-training>
  - ICAN, The Children's Communication Charity - <https://ican.org.uk/>
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## Useful Links

### Academic Studies

- Norbury, C. F., Gooch, D., Wray, C., Baird, G., Charman, T., Simonoff, E., . . . 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 and Psychiatry*, 57(11), 1247-1257. <https://acamh.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcpp.12573>
- Yew, S. G. K., & O’Kearney, R. (2013). Emotional and behavioural outcomes later in childhood and adolescence for children with specific language impairments: meta-analyses of controlled prospective studies. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 54(5), 516-524. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12009>
- Young, A. R., Beitchman, J. H., Johnson, C., Douglas, L., Atkinson, L., Escobar, M., & Wilson, B. (2002). Young adult academic outcomes in a longitudinal sample of early identified language impaired and control children. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 43(5), 635-645. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-7610.00052>

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## Speakers



**Dr Susan Ebbels**  
Director  
Moor House Research  
and Training Institute

Susan has worked at Moor House with children with Language Disorder, including Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) as a Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist for over 20 years.

Prior to this, she worked in mainstream and special schools, language units, nurseries and clinics both as a speech and language therapist and earlier as a speech and language therapy assistant. She has an honorary lectureship at UCL (where she completed her PhD in 2005) and is also a specialist advisor for the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. She is on the editorial boards of two peer reviewed journals, the International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders and Child Language Teaching and Therapy. She is passionate about the need for evidence-based practice and has carried out, coordinated and published many intervention studies on a range of areas, but with a particular focus on improving the comprehension and production of grammar in children with language disorders using her SHAPE CODING™ system. She delivers regular courses both on the SHAPE CODING™ system and on the current evidence base for school-aged children with DLD.



**Hilary Nicoll**  
Specialist Teacher &  
MHRTI Trainer

Hilary is an experienced, evidence-based Highly Specialist Speech & Language Therapist within the field of language disorders, including Developmental Language Disorder (DLD).

Working across both Moor House School & College and the Research & Training Institute, Hilary provides highly specialist interventions to a small caseload of students with DLD in 1:1 small group and classroom sessions, working within an integrated, intensive speech and language therapy service.

She also provides expert support, advice and training to both internal and external professionals, including Makaton (regional tutor), the SHAPE CODING™ system (accredited trainer), The Listening Program® (certified provider) and Signed English (tutor).

Hilary is a regular presenter at conferences and recently co-authored a research paper on the effectiveness of semantic intervention for word-finding difficulties in college-aged students with persistent language disorders.



**Sue Marr**  
Specialist Teacher  
(DLD) & MHRTI  
Trainer

An experienced teacher in both mainstream and SEN settings, Sue began her career in a mainstream school and in 1996 started working for the London Borough of Bromley as KS2 specialist teacher in both their language units.

It was here that she began supporting pupils with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). Sue worked closely with Speech & Language Therapists (SLTs) to deliver specialist language teaching and supported pupils' re-integration into mainstream classes.

In 2006, she joined the teaching staff at Moor House and has extensive experience of devising and delivering a mainstream curriculum that has been highly differentiated for the language needs of the pupils in her class. She has worked closely alongside speech and language therapists for many years to ensure that speech and language therapy can be integrated throughout the curriculum using a range of specialist systems.

In 2019, Sue was seconded to the MHRTI as a trainer to develop a range of courses for mainstream schools. In addition, Sue works as a literacy group intervention lead teacher, supporting students from KS2-KS4 who have DLD and additional literacy needs.