

Developmental Language Disorders

For many children speech and language skills will be acquired as part of the normal developmental process. However, it is estimated that around 7% of children (that's about 2 in every classroom!) will have significant difficulties in this area of their development. Often there is no underlying cause and life can become quite a struggle for these children.



School can be a particularly stressful environment for children with speech and language difficulties. It can feel like your being thrown in at the deep end, when everyone else seems to be swimming along happily! Imagine how you would feel if you got lost in a foreign country and had to ask for directions. You may know a little of the language but would probably struggle to understand ... and are likely to remain lost!!

As a child learns to talk they need to be able to:-

- Understand words, sentences and conversations
- Talk using words and sentences
- Use language in the right way during social interactions with others
- Have a good awareness of different speech sounds and be able to say these sounds correctly (and in the right order) so that other people can understand them

Children with developmental language disorders have difficulties learning and using language. However, they may have very good skills in other areas of their development. These difficulties may not always be obvious especially if the child is saying words clearly ... some children become very good at 'hiding' their difficulties.



Children with a developmental language disorder (sometimes referred to as 'Specific Language Impairment') can have a range of difficulties including any of the following:-

- May have some good ideas but be unable to express them.
- Appear to have a lot of language but it can sound disorganised and difficult to follow. The child may frequently change the topic of conversation and assume that everyone knows what he/she is talking about!
- Able to talk in sentences but speech can be difficult to understand.
- Struggle to understand what lots of words mean.
- Sometimes know the word he/she wants but be unable to remember it when needed.
- Have great difficulty following long sentences.
- May become frustrated or withdrawn and display behavioural difficulties.
- Struggle with reading and writing. Some children can be very good 'mechanical' readers but have great difficulty understanding what they are reading.

Speech and Language Therapy Support

A child with disordered language development will need structured, often long term support. All children with Developmental Language Disorder/Specific Language Impairment are different and some of these children can have very severe and complex needs.



The Speech and Language Therapist will be involved in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of children with speech, language and communication needs. However, there needs to be a 'team' approach in the treatment of children with complex speech and language disorders. Other professionals are likely to be involved, along with the child's parent/carer where possible.

References

The SLI Handbook – compiled by I CAN and Afasic, 2011
Norbury, C.F, Tomblin, J.B, & Bishop, D.V.M., (2008), Understanding Developmental Language Disorders, Psychology Press