



Signs of Language Disorder

Language Disorder affects the way a person understands and uses language. Language Disorder is an umbrella term that refers to both Language Disorder associated with a biomedical condition and Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). Students with Language Disorder may have difficulty with receptive language (understanding) and/or expressive language (using language), and this may occur across spoken or written modalities.

Keywords: *Language Disorder, understanding, receptive, expressive*

The Importance of Language

Language skills are the building blocks of learning and communication. Language is essential for students to express themselves, build connections, and advocate for themselves. Students with Language Disorder present in many different ways within a classroom environment. These challenges can lead to frustration and poor self-confidence.

Understanding Terminology

In the past, there have been several terminology changes when discussing language and communication disorders, making it difficult to identify and support students with these challenges. A recent consensus on terminology has resulted in more consistency. It is important to understand the differences between Language Disorder and DLD, as seen in the diagram below to best support your students:

Language Disorder (Language Disorder and DLD = roughly 10% of the population)	
<p>2.3% of children have Language Disorder associated with a biomedical condition</p> <p>Refers to Language Disorder that is associated with biomedical conditions. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autism • Intellectual disability • Cerebral palsy • Brain injury • Sensorineural hearing loss • Down syndrome 	<p>7.6% of children have Developmental Language Disorder</p> <p>Refers to persistent and significant language difficulties without an associated condition. However, DLD can commonly co-occur with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder • Developmental coordination disorder • Dyslexia • Dyscalculia <p>However, these conditions are not directly associated with Language Disorder</p>



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Please note that the following signs are not an exhaustive or diagnostic checklist for Language Disorder, including Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) or Language Disorder associated with a biomedical condition. Rather, this list has been designed to assist the student's education team in recognising potential language difficulties that may warrant further investigation. It serves as a guide to help determine if a referral to a speech pathologist is needed to assess and understand the student's language profile more comprehensively.

Students with Language Disorder may have difficulties in the following areas:

Vocabulary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning new vocabulary. • Retrieving vocabulary – also referred to as 'word-finding difficulties'. • Using specific and complex vocabulary – may instead use non-specific words e.g., 'stuff', 'thing' or simple vocabulary compared to same-aged peers.
Following Instructions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding and remembering instructions – increased difficulty with multi-step instructions, or instructions that contain complex vocabulary and abstract concepts. • Following non-routine instructions – may copy their peers after instructions are provided.
Expressing Thoughts and Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing thoughts, feelings or events cohesively and clearly – may re-start or re-formulate their sentences. • Using grammatically correct sentences in their spoken and written communication – may produce words or sentences that are 'incomplete' or 'inconsistent' or use shorter sentences compared to their peers.
Asking and Answering Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answering literal and higher-level language questions – may provide incorrect or incomplete answers or confuse question types. • Asking questions and participating in class discussions and group work – may appear withdrawn, disruptive, or rely heavily on their peers.
Language Comprehension
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening and remembering what others have said or what they have read – increased difficulties understanding complex language or large amounts of information. • Discriminating between essential and non-essential information. • Using higher-level comprehension skills such as inferencing, reasoning and analysing. • Understanding academic content (especially language-heavy subject matter).



Using Social Language

- Initiating and participating in conversations, especially within groups – may have difficulties asking and answering questions, taking turns or repairing communication breakdowns.
- Understanding and following the rules of a game.
- Forming and maintaining strong friendships with peers.
- Understanding jokes and use of sarcasm.
- Recognising social problems, negotiating and/or resolving conflicts.
- Applying social language such as matching communication style to the context.
- Understanding social cues (e.g., tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, implied meanings, etc).

Reading and Writing

- Making links between letters, sounds and words.
- Comprehending and interpreting written information.
- Using correct sentence and paragraph structure within written tasks.
- Using descriptive and detailed language within written tasks.

Subject-Specific Tasks (e.g. Mathematics)

- Learning and recalling subject-specific concepts e.g., the language of mathematics.
- Comprehending word problems in mathematics.
- Comprehending task requirements and understanding complex worksheets – may have difficulties understanding cognitive verbs (e.g., explain, analyse, justify, etc).

What should I do if I suspect a student has Language Disorder?

Consultation with a speech pathologist is essential to determine the nature of the student's communication difficulties. Other professionals who may be involved include hearing specialists, psychologists, occupational therapists and paediatricians.

Want to learn more?

To learn more about Language Disorder and how to support children and young people for whom language is their primary disorder, please **contact us**. Language Disorder Australia provides holistic, innovative and effective therapy, education and support services and has a transdisciplinary team of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, educators, psychologists and physiotherapists.

Contact: 1300 881 763 or hello@languagedisorder.org.au

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Partnered with

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