

The DLDandMe.org Guide to Terminology in the USA

The terms used to refer to Developmental Language Disorder vary by setting and purpose. Keep this guide handy to reduce confusion!

Developmental language disorder (DLD)

This is ICD-11* Code 6A01.2, a broad category that includes 6A01.20 Developmental language disorder with impairment of receptive and expressive language, 6A01.21 Developmental language disorder with impairment of mainly expressive language, among others.

Likely setting: Hospital; Speech-Language Clinic; or wherever insurance billing applies

Specific developmental disorders of speech & language

This is ICD-10* Code F80, a broad category that includes F80.1 Expressive language disorder, F80.2 Mixed expressive receptive language disorder, and F80.89 Other developmental disorders of speech and language, among others.

Likely setting: Hospital; Speech-Language Clinic; or wherever insurance billing applies

Oral/written language disorder

A synonym for DLD.

Likely Setting: Learning Disabilities Clinic, Research literature; Speech-Language Clinic

Language delay

This is an accurate term to describe the language problems faced by some toddlers and preschoolers, but it is inaccurate as applied to DLD. The term 'delay' implies that the child will catch up to peers without any intervention or special services. This is not the case for children with DLD. Nevertheless, it is sometimes used as a synonym for DLD.

Likely setting: School; Speech-Language Clinic; Hospital

Mental impairment

The ADA*** term for any psychological or mental disorder (as opposed to a physical impairment). The ADA is purposefully broad, but the law does list some examples including "Specific Learning Disabilities."

For this reason, most people with DLD who seek accommodations at the post-secondary level or in the workplace do so using the term specific learning disability.

Likely setting: Colleges, Universities, Workplace

General delay

An IDEA** recognized category. It is not used in all school districts. Those that do use it, typically reserve the term to describe children who are 8 years old or younger. It is a broad category that may include children with DLD but also children with other conditions.

Likely setting: Elementary schools

Speech or language impairment

An IDEA** recognized category that includes DLD but also other conditions such as Speech Sound Disorder, Fluency/Stuttering Disorder, and Voice Disorders.

Likely setting: Elementary, middle, or high school

Specific learning disability

An IDEA** recognized category that includes DLD but also other conditions such as Dyscalculia (problems with math) and Dysgraphia (problems with handwriting and other motor skills).

Likely setting: Elementary, middle, or high school

Learning disability

This is a general term that includes DLD but also other conditions such as Dyscalculia (problems with math) and Dysgraphia (problems with handwriting and motor skills).

Likely setting: Colleges; Learning disabilities clinic; Universities; Workplace; Research literature

Communication disorder

This is a broad category that includes DLD but also conditions such as Apraxia, Fluency/Stuttering Disorder, Voice Disorders, and Acquired Aphasia.

Likely Setting: Hospital; Research literature; Speech-Language Clinic

Neurodevelopmental disability

This is a general term that includes DLD but also many other conditions such as Autism, Developmental Coordination Disorder, Intellectual Disability, and Tourette Syndrome.

Likely setting: Hospital; Research literature

Specific language impairment (SLI)

Now typically replaced by DLD****

Likely setting: Research literature

Developmental aphasia or dysphasia

Dated, rarely used currently.

Likely setting: Research literature

*The ICD-11, or the International Classification of Diseases-eleventh edition, is a medical coding system developed by the World Health Organization. Each ICD-11 code refers to a diagnosis. The ICD-10 is the previous edition of the ICD, and you may still find its terms in use.

**IDEA, or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1975; with numerous reauthorizations since), is a law that mandates free and appropriate education for children with disabilities. If the disability falls into one of 14 recognized categories and it interferes with receipt of education, the child can receive special services from providers like a speech-language pathologist or a reading specialist.

***The ADA, or Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 is a civil rights law that protects individuals with disabilities from discrimination in when functioning in settings that include employment, higher education, government, commercial and public facilities, transportation, and telecommunications.

****Bishop, D.V., Snowling, M.J., Thompson, P. A., Greenhalgh, T., Catalise-2 Consortium, Adams, C., ... & house, A. (2017) . Phase 2 of CATALISE: A multinational and multidisciplinary Delphi consensus study of problems with language development: Terminology. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 58(10), 1068 - 1080.