

## SPEECH LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES

# Supporting Children and Young People with DLD in Mainstream Schools

### Universal Support

#### 1. Create communication-supportive environment

**Reduce background noise:** this helps children and young people attend to what you say without having to filter out additional noise. Consider your setting's policies when deciding how to do this – some ideas are to close doors and windows, and to encourage only one person to talk at a time.

**Consider seating arrangements:** children and young people with DLD find it easier to filter out distractions and listen if they face the speaker.

**Plan and use visual supports, such as:**

- Pictures, symbols, graphs, diagrams and mind maps.
- Visually labelled classroom resources – photos, symbols and images – as well as words.
- Highlighting/underlining/emboldening key words or putting them in a different colour.
- A visual timetable or written list of activities for the day or lesson. Update this regularly by removing or crossing out tasks when completed.

**Reduce classroom clutter/visual 'noise':** an environment that is too visually stimulating can be overwhelming and distracting for some children and young people.

#### 2. Adapt your language

**Attract attention first:** agree a signal that indicates the need for whole-class attention or for instructions to specific individuals. Say the names of children and young people before giving them an instruction.

**Give simple instructions:** avoid inferential language or hidden meanings.

**P** Give instructions in the order you want them to be followed, and avoid more abstract words like *before* and *after*.

**S** Explain any abstract terms you use.



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**Use familiar vocabulary** that you know children and young people understand. Explicitly highlight when you use a new or less familiar word, and check for understanding.

**Give extra thinking time and processing time:** pause between explaining key points and ideas, and don't talk for too long at any one time.

**Use gestures** to support what you say.

**Repeat key points** and summarise what you have said at the end

As part of a consultation, commissioned in 2018, the views of 56 children and young people aged between 5 and 16 years of age with SLCN across a range of settings were gathered (Bercow, 2018).

Children and young people were asked what they like and do not like in terms of the type of support they get in school. Many children and young people identified that they find it helpful when teachers simplify their language:

- Talk at my level – helpful because you are understanding what the person is saying.
- Talk slowly – because we need to take things slowly – because do you understand this? [demonstrates speaking quickly].

### 3. Explicit vocabulary

**Explicitly teach key vocabulary** at the beginning of a new topic and review it often.

**Explicitly teach all the features of a word**, using word webs and mind maps to make it visual:

- What does it mean?
- What category/group does it belong to?
- What is it used for/what does it do?
- What does it sound like – what sound does it begin with, how many syllables, what words does it rhyme with?



**Link new words to words and topics that children and young people already know** and relate new words to their experiences.

**P For example:** Enormous, that means very big. Remember the elephant we saw on the school trip to the zoo? He was enormous.

**S For example:** Colossal, that means very big. Remember the statue we saw on the school trip to the museum? It was colossal

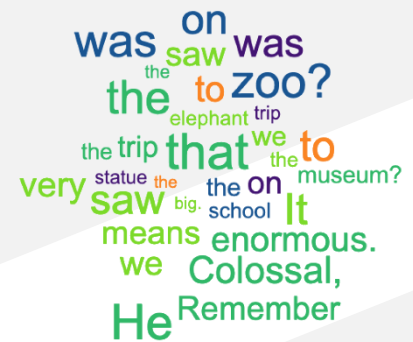
**Reuse and highlight key words frequently and give children and young people lots of opportunities to practise using them by saying them**, using them in a sentence and writing them down.

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**Encourage children and young people to ask when they do not understand** a word during lessons and then teach the meaning and practise together.

**Encourage children and young people to keep a record** of new words that are introduced in a vocabulary book, a word wall display or a word bank.

- 5 **Explicitly teach 'tier 2' vocabulary:** these are words commonly used across a variety of subjects and can often be found in learning objectives, such as explain, summarise, discuss. Without these words it is difficult for children and young people to understand what they are meant to be doing.
- 5 **Teach children and young people the structure of words:** root words, prefixes (mis-, re-, dis-) and suffixes (-ing, -ship, -ment), to make it easier for them to break down words when learning them.
- 5 **Teach comprehension strategies** such as using context to work out the meaning of a word, or highlight unfamiliar words and look up the definition, including using technology to help.



### 4. Encourage all children and young people to monitor their own understanding and ask for help

**Create a safe and supportive environment** where asking for help is encouraged.

**Respond positively** when children and young people ask questions, ask for help or ask you to repeat something, rather than viewing this as a sign that they were distracted or choosing not to listen.

**Encourage children and young people to ask for extra thinking time** if needed.

**Explicitly teach all children and young people to identify occasions when they don't understand** and what help they need. For example:

- Was there a specific word that they did not understand? → What does X mean?
- Was there a lot of background noise so they found it hard to tune in to listening? → I didn't hear you, can you say it again/louder?
- Was the information given too quickly? → Can you say it more slowly?
- Was the speaker too quiet? → Can you say it more loudly?
- Was the message too long or complex? → There are too many words.
- Do they just need to hear it again to allow them more time for processing? → Can you say it again?

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**Plan ways for children and young people to ask for help discreetly:** for example, a card on their desk to turn over if they need help, or a traffic light system where they can move a counter on to different colours based on how confident they feel with a particular task.

**Have visual cues or key phrases/prompts** for children and young people to use to ask for help on display or on their desks to remind them.

In the 2018 consultation, children and young people with SLCN identified that it was helpful to have an environment where they were encouraged to ask questions and say when they do not understand (Bercow, 2018):

- *Check I understand – in a way it can save time.*
- *Make it easy to ask questions.*
- *It isn't good when they shout if we don't understand, 'cos people might get a little bit sad.*

### 5. Plan opportunities to develop and use communication skills

**Plan hands-on activities, demonstrations and roleplay** when learning new concepts and information.

**Plan opportunities for communication throughout the day:** paired working, small group activities, turn-to-your-partner-type talking activities.

**Try having a 'No Pens Day Wednesday'** on other days of the year! See the free downloadable lesson plans and activity ideas on the website.



**Trial different options for paired and group working**, such as pairing children and young people with more developed language abilities with those who are less able, versus pairing children and young people with similar language abilities together.

**P Use role cards for group working:** roles could be the leader (ensures people stay on track and finish on time), the coach (uses scripted phrases to give encouragement), the questioner (asks questions) and the stores person (hands out equipment).

**S Give specific roles for group work:** for example, the encourager (supports and reinforces responses), the questioner (challenges with questions), the timekeeper (keeps the discussion within the agreed time limit), the leader (starts and leads discussion), the summariser (summarises everyone's views at the end) and the observer (observes and ensures everyone's ideas are heard, reports back at the end on the process and things that went well/not so well).