

Diagnostic Decisions: Is this Language Disorder developmental or acquired?

Diagnostic Scenario

A school-age child is referred to SLP/SALT services (see DLD Diagnostics v. 1)
SLP/SALT assessment indicates the presence of a persistent language disorder with a significant impact on everyday interactions or school learning and no associated biomedical condition.

Is this a developmental condition making the diagnosis of DLD warranted? Or is it acquired making it a Language Disorder associated with the injury?

There is an early history of concern regarding language development

There is no available evidence of an early history of concern regarding language development

Provide DLD diagnosis

There is no evidence of an acquired condition. The developmental nature of the condition can be assumed.

Provide DLD diagnosis

There is evidence of an acquired condition reasonably expected to impact language development.

Provide diagnosis of Language Disorder associated with [acquired condition]

Diagnostic Decision

Notes:

1. DLD is frequently undetected until school entry (Calder et al., 2022; Tomblin et al., 1997). The predictive value of family history and other early indicators of development is debatable (Calder et al., 2024). A lack of evidence for concerns during early developmental stages cannot be taken as evidence that there were no developmental signs of language disorders during these periods.
2. Acquired neurological conditions in childhood are much rarer than developmental conditions. In developed countries, prevalence of parent-reported traumatic brain injury rates in children 4 years or younger range from 0.6% (Haarbauer-Krupa et al., 2018) to 3.3% (Wang et al., 2023). The prevalence of DLD is 7.2% (Norbury et al., 2016).
3. In children with a lifetime history of traumatic brain injury, speech and/or language problems occur in 18.6% (Haarbauer-Krupa et al., 2018).

References: Calder et al. (2022) JPC, 58, 2044-50; Calder et al. (2024) IJLCD, 59:396-412; Haarbauer-Krupa et al. (2018) JAMA, 172:1078-86; Norbury et al. (2016) JCPP, 57:1247-57; Tomblin et al. (1997) JSLHR, 40:1245-60; Wang et al. (2023, February) Health Promotion & Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada: RPP, 43(2)

Notes & References