

# Diagnostic Decisions: Considering DLD in Context of Low Average Language Test Scores

Diagnostic Scenario

Speech-language pathologists / therapists combine information from multiple sources including caregiver report, observation, standardized tests, language learning context, etc. Many factors influence decisions regarding what is or is not included in an assessment. This scenario focuses on standardized language tests scores.

Child referred to SLP/SALT services (see DLD Diagnostics v. 1)  
SLP/SALT standardized language assessment is not clearly indicative of language disorder  
(scores in the borderline average to low average range)

Could this still be DLD?

Additional evidence in favour of a DLD diagnosis

- Additional standardized language test chosen based on reason for referral indicates language disorder
- Results of dynamic assessment indicate presence of language disorder
- Standardized & psychometrically sound parent or teacher checklists indicate language disorder
- Written language deficits indicate presence of a language disorder

Considerations

- Are the psychometric properties of your tests sufficient for identifying DLD?
- Is referred child comparable to test's normative sample?
- What language(s) does the child speak? What language are tests completed in?
- What are the results of previous assessments, interventions, or services in a response to intervention framework?
- Is poor performance under conditions of high load related to language demands?
- Is there evidence that language skills are substantially different from peers in some way?

Additional evidence disconfirming a DLD diagnosis

DLD often co-occurs with conditions such as ADHD & speech sound disorder, and can occur in children who do not speak the majority language. These factors, however, could – on their own – account for low average language test performance.

- Poor performance is **FULLY** accounted for by one of the following:
  - Other conditions such as ADHD or Speech Sound Disorder
  - Risk factors<sup>1</sup> known to impact language development
  - Opportunities for instruction
  - Dialect differences
  - Second language differences
- There is no functional impact related to a language disorder

Diagnostic Decision