



Communication and Interaction Team

Understanding the links between language and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)

Children and young people (CYP) who have been diagnosed with DLD are more likely to be at risk of emotional difficulties in comparison to the general population 1. DLD can often co-occur with other disorders such as ADHD, reading disorders and conduct disorders; this complicated picture of need can impact on a young person's SEMH development. The multifaceted relationships between SEMH and DLD means that more often than not, many CYP with communication difficulties are unidentified or misunderstood altogether.

Risk factors of unidentified and unsupported DLD

Difficulties forming relationships and friendships
Increased anxiety linked to emotional literacy development

- Literacy difficulties which impact on school work
- Exclusion from school
- Involvement in the youth justice system
- Increased risk of being bullied or becoming a bully
- Effect on emotional wellbeing (self-esteem, self-worth, feeling stupid)



Reducing risk factors

The potential impact of DLD on a CYP social, emotional and mental wellbeing development can be narrowed through:

- Identification; is there a 'hidden need'?
- Raised awareness of the challenges a CYP face with their mental health and wellbeing, relationships, personal development, education, employment, and quality of life
- Considered and appropriate support to meet both DLD and SEMH need; using a DLD lens to adapt SEMH based interventions to include language friendly approaches
- Understand the role and impact of adult language; adjusting language of adults ensuring it is accessible for children with DLD

Considerations

- **Behaviour is communication of an unmet need; could this be SLCN?** Use screeners and other tools which may recommend a SALT referral pathway
- **Pieces of a puzzle; what other indicators are there to suggest SLCN?** Red flag indicators and screening tools to gain a holistic picture of the CYP needs
- **Are CYP accessing what they need?** Classrooms, material and intervention programmes that are communication and interaction friendly, ensuring they are accessible to all CYP

The C&I team can support you to meet the needs of any pupil with SLCN who has either been seen by the speech and language therapy team or who is waiting to be seen. Please use our usual referral pathway.

Useful resources, links and further reading:

Understanding the links between communication and behaviour

<https://www.rcslt.org/-/media/Project/RCSLT/rcslt-communication-and-behaviour-factsheet.pdf>

Supporting SEMH in pupils with DLD and other SLCN

<https://www.rcslt.org/-/media/Project/RCSLT/rcslt-social-emotional-mental-health-factsheet.pdf>