Support offer

Equipping professionals

Guidance and support for students with a developmental language disorder (DLD, in Dutch: TOS)

Tips for education professionals

ECIO

leren
zonder belemmering

Effective support, such as visual aids, structured instruction, repetition and extra processing time, can help students study successfully. Patience and giving students the space to express themselves are also essential.

A developmental language disorder (DLD) is a neurocognitive developmental disorder, meaning that language is processed differently in the brain. Students with DLD may have difficulty processing spoken language, may have a limited vocabulary, challenges with grammar and sentence structure, and difficulties with oral and written communication. Some also find it hard to remember and apply instructions or to formulate their thoughts fluently. This can be very energy-consuming and can affect their communication, learning process, and social interactions.

By responding to both the strengths and challenges of students with DLD, you create an inclusive and stimulating learning environment in which they can reach their full potential.

Challenges

Organisational	May have difficulty processing instructions, planning, and working independently.
Learning	May have challenges with language comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and formulating thoughts.
Social/emotional	May experience overstimulation, stress, and anxiety, which can make regulating emotions particularly challenging.

Positive characteristics

- Creative.
- Perseverance.
- Resilient.
- Strong visual thinker
- Empathic.
- Practical.

Challenging characteristics

- Difficulty with speech production and grammatical structure.
- Problems with language comprehension, especially with complex sentences.
- Limited vocabulary and word-finding difficulties.
- Challenges in structuring stories, both spoken and written
- Challenges in social communication, such as having conversations and understanding non-verbal cues.

Structure and consistency

Students with DLD benefit from visual supports alongside verbal communication, as images are often easier to retain than words. It is important to offer regularity in tasks and clear expectations to provide structure. Consistent instructions and working methods help prevent confusion and uncertainty. Repetition and predictable patterns support the retention and application of information. By providing structured communication and a clear lesson format, you create a predictable and safe learning environment for students with DLD.

On the following pages, you will find practical tips to support students with DLD.

Contact hours
(lectures/classes, group work/tutorials, etc.)

Structure & predictability

- Use visual aids alongside verbal communication.
- Provide regularity in tasks and set clear expectations.
- Consistent instructions and working methods help prevent confusion.
- Repetition and predictable patterns support memory and retention.
- Ensure predictability through clear planning and structure.

Information & instruction

- Use simple and clear language in assignments and instructions.
- Give short, structured instructions and address one task at a time.
- Use visual support such as diagrams, icons and videos.
- Use presentations with clear layout and sans serif font (Arial, Calibri) in size 24.
- Offer assignments in different forms (written, oral, digital).

Flexibility & freedom of choice

- Copying notes from fellow students can be supportive.
- Provide lecture recordings with subtitles for review and supplementing notes.
- Allow choice in assignment format (e.g., written, visual).
- Offer - if possible - physical or online participation (with subtitles).
- Give time for processing and silence.
- Avoid unexpected speaking moments/'on-the-spot' tasks.

Social support

- Create an open atmosphere in which students feel comfortable asking for help.
- Encourage peer support and buddy systems.
- Provide a fixed contact person within the programme.
- Collaborate with student services for additional coaching and guidance.

Physical environment

- Provide well-lit and quiet learning environments.

Testing and examination

Structure & predictability

- Provide clear and unambiguous exam questions.
- Give guidelines on the expected length of the exam and the answers.
- Formulate instructions clearly and consistently.
- Offer sample questions and model answers for preparation.
- Allow students to rephrase questions to check understanding.
- Provide oral clarification after written exams.

Flexibility & freedom of choice

- Allow extra time for both oral and written exams.
- Permit the use of a laptop with supportive software during exams.
- Offer alternative forms of assessment.
- Allow exams to be spread out to prevent overload.

Physical environment

- Provide a quiet exam environment.

Independent study tasks

Structure & overview

- Provide an overview of tasks and assignments to support efficient planning.
- Offer time management training and study support.
- Make the link between study materials and practical application explicit.
- Provide clear, written instructions on scope and expectations.
- Check that students understand the assignment before they begin.
- Break large assignments into smaller components with interim feedback.
- Allow students to use tools such as spell checkers and text-to-speech software.
- Offer writing support to help students structure their texts more effectively.

Communication & guidance

- Use learning objectives and sample questions to encourage self-study.
- Offer glossaries and grammar overviews as support.
- Offer study coaching to help students distinguish between main and secondary issues.

Planning & organisation

- Provide clear written instructions on scope and expectations of assignments.
- Break large assignments into smaller tasks with interim feedback moments.

Internship and graduation

In advance

- Announce the internship or graduation period well in advance.
- Make the link between curriculum and the professional field explicit.
- Draw up a guidance plan.
- Discuss preferences for guidance.
- Use simple and clear language in assignments and instructions.
- Offer assignments in different formats (e.g., written, oral, digital).
- Make expectations, goals and roles concrete.
- Provide good examples of assignments or report structures.
- Encourage students to ask questions in advance about anything unclear or expectations.

During

- Provide a fixed point of contact.
- Discuss possible communication hesitance related to DLD.
- Allow students to use tools such as spell-checkers when writing reports.
- Offer support with time management and planning.
- Schedule regular check-ins with the workplace/internship supervisor and teacher for evaluation.
- Create a safe environment for feedback and self-reflection.
- Encourage students to communicate actively about their progress and challenges.

Afterwards

- Evaluate the internship or thesis process together.
- Discuss which approaches and agreements worked well.
- Give concrete, positive feedback on growth and qualities.
- Provide guidance for the transition to work and for processing feedback.
- Offer follow-up support, such as job coaching or networking meetings.

Other tips

Inclusive language

- Use visual aids, such as diagrams, icons and videos, to clarify communication.

Individual differences

- Tailor guidance to the unique needs and strengths of each student.

Neurodiversity

- Educate yourself about neurodiversity.
- Include the lived experiences and preferences of neurodivergent students to ensure truly inclusive support.
- Share successful approaches with colleagues to help create an inclusive culture.

Inclusive education

Eight elements

- **Education system**
- **Learning environment & culture**
- **Curriculum & assessment**
- **Support offer**
- **Equipping professionals**
- **Transition to and from education**
- **National & regional cooperation**
- **Monitoring & data use**

Students with DLD benefit from an education system that is flexible and inclusive. Diverse assessment formats, flexible deadlines and accessible guidance are essential to meet their specific needs.

It is important that teachers have the right skills for effective support. Collaboration between teaching teams is necessary so that students do not have to keep asking for the same facilities.

Regular monitoring of progress ensures ongoing and improved support. This enhances the motivation and acceptance of students with DLD.

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Want to know more?

ECIO helps educational institutions shape inclusive education, improve mental wellbeing, and ease the transition from education to work. Want to know more? Contact us or check out our websites. We would love to help you!

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