

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR SPEECH PATHOLOGIST



Speech pathologists are perfectly placed to support people with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) and their families. In order to become a Speech pathologist they will need to have completed a 4 year undergraduate or 2+ year master's degrees and have a wealth of knowledge and experience. They also WANT to support you and your loved one, so don't be afraid to ask questions. So how can you, as a family, maximise working with a speech pathologist? Here are our recommended list of questions to ask at your next appointment.

1. WHAT HAS THE INITIAL ASSESSMENT SHOWN ARE MY CHILD'S STRENGTHS AND AREAS OF NEED?

After bringing your child to the speech pathologist and watching them do all sorts of activities, a report will soon follow filled with lots of information. It is critical that you understand the details of the report to help you make informed decisions. Take notes and ask further clarifying questions. There will be some skills that will need to be worked on, while your child's identified strengths can be utilised to support their learning.

2. WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE IN SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH DLD?

Speech pathologists work in the areas of communication and swallowing across the lifespan. This means they graduate from university with a wide range of knowledge and experience. While all speech pathologists have the qualifications to assess and provide therapy for DLD, they will have varying degrees of clinical expertise. Your speech pathologist will be able to tell you about their experience working with people with DLD. It will be up to you at this point to decide if they have the level of experience with DLD that your child needs.

3. WHAT DO YOU SUGGEST WOULD BE A REALISTIC FREQUENCY FOR THERAPY AND WHAT GOALS SHOULD WE WORK ON?

There is currently no "gold standard" for DLD and therapy needs to be individualised for the child. Factors contributing to frequency of therapy may include: goals, costs, availability etc. Your speech pathologist will be able to make recommendations for frequency, as well as describe targeted goals for therapy. Remember, these are estimated goals and the time to achieve will vary between individuals.

4. WHAT TYPES OF INTERVENTIONS OR PROGRAMS WILL YOU BE USING DURING THERAPY?

This question is important, so you are aware of the types of interventions or programs you will expect to see during therapy. The level of evidence for interventions does vary depending on the available research and unfortunately there are some instances where well meaning or well marketed tools are ineffective. The DLD Project recommends "Making Sense of Interventions for Children with Developmental Disorders" by Bowen & Snow for families to read.

5. WHAT CAN WE DO AS A FAMILY AT HOME TO SUPPORT THE THERAPY?

Whether you're a parent/caregiver, grandparent, aunt/uncle or friend, everybody has a role to play in supporting children with DLD. Ask your speech pathologist for ideas, activities or strategies you can use at home to reinforce the work you're doing in therapy.

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6. HOW WILL YOU MONITOR MY CHILD'S PROGRESS?

Your speech pathologist will be able to describe how they will measure the outcomes of therapy. This might include anecdotal feedback from educators, family members and/or yourself, as well as data collection and further assessment. This will help you form an expectation of your commitment to therapy to achieve the therapy goals.

7. HOW WILL WE DECIDE WHEN TO STOP THERAPY OR TAKE BREAKS?

Families will often want to know “how long” until they see results or finish therapy. This is often a difficult question for speech pathologists to answer. As DLD is a lifelong condition, it is likely children with DLD will need support from a speech pathologist in different capacities throughout their life. Be sure to clarify if there is an approximate timeframe for receiving services or achieving goals. Also consider taking planned breaks from therapy rather than burning out – breaks can be a wonderful opportunity for consolidating new skills!

8. ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC SERVICES OR FUNDING FOR PEOPLE WITH DLD IN OUR LOCAL AREA? IF SO, HOW DO I FIND OUT FURTHER INFORMATION?

Services and funding vary greatly across the different states and territories of Australia. It is important to ask your speech pathologist what is available in your local context. This may include: speech pathology services directly at the early childhood setting or school; DLD specific services (though few!); accessing the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) etc.

9. ARE THERE ANY OTHER PROFESSIONALS WE SHOULD BE CONTACTING TO SEEK FURTHER SUPPORT?

Children with DLD may have areas of difficulty beyond language. This might include fine/gross motor, behaviour, literacy, mental health etc. Your speech pathologist will be able to advise if further assessment or intervention may be required from an occupational therapist, physiotherapist, psychologist, specialist teacher etc.

10. CAN YOU RECOMMEND ANY INFORMATION, RESOURCES OR TRAINING THAT WOULD HELP OUR FAMILY BETTER UNDERSTAND AND SUPPORT MY CHILD?

Speech pathologists are a wealth of knowledge regarding tools. They may be able to suggest books to purchase, information to read and groups to connect with. If in doubt, explore TheDLDProject.com for lots of information, resources and training!