



[Home](#) → [Medical Encyclopedia](#) → Developmental expressive language disorder

URL of this page: [//medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001544.htm](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001544.htm)

Developmental expressive language disorder

Developmental expressive language disorder is a condition in which a child has lower than normal ability in vocabulary, saying complex sentences, and remembering words. However, a child with this disorder may have the normal language skills needed to understand verbal or written communication.

Causes

Developmental expressive language disorder is common in school-age children.

The causes are not well understood. Damage to the cerebrum of the brain and malnutrition may cause some cases. Genetic factors may also be involved.

Symptoms

Children with an expressive language disorder have a hard time getting their meaning or message across to others.

Symptoms of this disorder may include any of the following:

- Below-average vocabulary skills
- Improper use of tenses (past, present, future)
- Problems making complex sentences
- Problems remembering words

Exams and Tests

Standardized expressive language and nonverbal intellectual tests should be conducted if an expressive language disorder is suspected. Testing for other learning disabilities may also be needed.

Treatment

Language therapy is the best method to treat this type of disorder. The goal is to increase the number of phrases a child can use. This is done by using block-building techniques and speech therapy.

Outlook (Prognosis)

How much the child recovers depends on the severity of the disorder. With reversible factors, such as vitamin deficiencies, there may be nearly full recovery.

Children who do not have any other developmental or motor coordination problems have the best outlook (prognosis). Often, such children have a family history of delays in language milestones, but eventually catch up.

Possible Complications

This disorder may lead to:

- Learning problems
- Low self-esteem
- Social problems

When to Contact a Medical Professional

If you are concerned about your child's language development, have them tested.

Prevention

Good nutrition during pregnancy, and early childhood and prenatal care may help.

Alternative Names

Language disorder - expressive; Specific language impairment

References

Bang JY, Feldman HM. Language development and communication disorders. In: Kliegman RM, St. Geme JW, Blum NJ, et al, eds. *Nelson Textbook of Pediatrics*. 22nd ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2025:chap 53.

Trauner DA, Nass RD. Developmental language disorders. In: Swaiman KF, Ashwal S, Ferriero DM, et al, eds. *Swaiman's Pediatric Neurology: Principles and Practice*. 6th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2017:chap 53.

Review Date 4/17/2024

Updated by: Neil K. Kaneshiro, MD, MHA, Clinical Professor of Pediatrics, University of Washington School of Medicine, Seattle, WA. Also reviewed by David C. Dugdale, MD, Medical Director, Brenda Conaway, Editorial Director, and the A.D.A.M. Editorial team.

[Learn how to cite this page](#)



A.D.A.M., Inc. is accredited by [URAC](http://www.urac.org), for Health Content Provider (www.urac.org). URAC's [accreditation program](#) is an independent audit to verify that A.D.A.M. follows rigorous standards of quality and accountability. A.D.A.M. is among the first to achieve this important distinction for online health information and services. Learn more about A.D.A.M.'s [editorial policy](#), [editorial process](#), and [privacy policy](#).

The information provided herein should not be used during any medical emergency or for the diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. A licensed medical professional should be consulted for diagnosis and treatment of any and all medical conditions. Links to other sites are provided for information only – they do not constitute endorsements of those other sites. No warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied, is made as to the accuracy, reliability, timeliness, or correctness of any translations made by a third-party service of the information provided herein into any other language. © 1997-2025 A.D.A.M., a business unit of Ebix, Inc. Any duplication or distribution of the information contained herein is strictly prohibited.



National Library of Medicine 8600 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20894 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
National Institutes of Health