

# SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER IDENTIFY AND EXPRESS EMOTIONS

## THE CONNECTION BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND EMOTION

- Language and Emotional Development Go Hand in Hand
  - Research shows that children with developmental language disorder (DLD) experience emotional, behavioral, and social difficulties
  - Language helps children make sense of their emotions and the emotions of others.
  - Strong language skills allow children to navigate and respond to social situations effectively
- What is Emotional Competence?
  - Emotional competence includes three key processes:
    - Emotion Regulation: The ability to manage and control emotions in different situations
    - Emotion Perception: Recognizing emotions in yourself and others
    - Emotion Understanding: Understanding why someone feels a certain way and how emotions influence behavior
- Why Emotional Competence Relies on Language
  - Language provides children the tools to label, describe, and process their emotions
  - Without a strong emotional vocabulary, children may struggle to:
    - Identify their feelings (e.g., knowing the difference between anger and frustration).
    - Communicate their needs or ask for help

(Bahn et al., 2021)

## WHY LABELLING EMOTIONS MATTERS

- Emotional labelling plays a critical role in language development and social interactions
- As children learn to label emotions, they gain tools to navigate social situations, resolve conflicts, and build meaningful relationships.

## WHY UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS MATTERS

- Children with strong emotional understanding are better able to:
  - Empathize with others and build positive relationships
  - Navigate social situations more effectively
  - Manage their own emotions in challenging circumstances



## WHY SUPPORTING EMOTIONS MATTER

- Helping children develop emotional competence can improve their ability to handle social situations, build confidence in expressing themselves and lay a foundation for stronger relationships with peers and adults.

(Bahn et al., 2021; Muyassaroh & Prasetyo, 2019; Thümmeler et al., 2022)

## AGE (YRS)

0-1

## DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONS IN CHILDREN

Infants develop foundational emotions such as joy, fear, anger, sadness, surprise, and interest.

1.5-2.5

Children begin to experience self-conscious emotions like pride, shame, compassion, envy, embarrassment, and guilt.

2.5

Toddlers begin interpreting their mental states, discussing the causes of emotions, and understanding how feelings change.

3

Children start using language to describe both positive and negative emotions, including words like joy, kindness, and anger.

5-6

Children recognize and manage their own emotions naturally and express emotions appropriately for different situations (e.g., joy, sadness, excitement).



(Giddan et al., 1995; Muyassaroh & Prasetyo, 2019; Thümmeler et al., 2022)

## CHALLENGES FOR CHILDREN WITH DLD

- Difficulties in Emotional Expression
  - Children with DLD often have smaller vocabularies, including fewer emotion-specific words
  - Children with DLD struggle to identify, label, and communicate their feelings effectively
  - This can lead to frustration in expressing feelings and difficulty understanding why others feel a certain way
- Delayed Emotional and Language Development
  - Emotional vocabulary emerges late or remains underdeveloped
  - Difficulty understanding the causes and consequences of emotions

(Bahn et al., 2021; Giddan et al., 1995)

Children with DLD do not acquire language and emotional skills through typical developmental processes. The following are ways parents and caregivers can support emotional understanding and labelling:

### MODEL AND LABEL EMOTIONS

01.

- Introduce and practice emotion words such as happy, sad, angry, tired, or surprised during natural conversations and gradually expand the vocabulary to include more complex emotions (e.g., affection, disgust, distress).
- Use descriptive language to label emotions in everyday interactions (e.g., “I see you’re feeling frustrated because the toy isn’t working”).

### ENCOURAGE EMOTIONAL LABELLING

02.

- Engage children in activities like drawing or role-playing to help them label and recognize emotions.
- Use photographs, storybooks, or scenarios to discuss emotions like happiness, anger, fear, and sadness.



### TEACH CAUSE-AND-EFFECT RELATIONSHIPS

03.

- Help children understand what causes certain feelings and how those feelings might change (e.g., “You’re sad because your toy broke, but we can fix it, and that will make you feel better!”).

### MODEL APPROPRIATE EMOTIONAL RESPONSES AND AWARENESS

04.

- Demonstrate how to express feelings and how to manage them (e.g., “I’m feeling upset, so I’m going to take deep breaths to calm down”).
- Show empathy by acknowledging their emotions (e.g., “I see that you’re upset. It’s okay to feel this way”).

FEEL  
YOUR  
FEELINGS

### COLLABORATE WITH EDUCATORS AND THERAPISTS

05.

- Work with speech-language pathologists and teachers to incorporate emotion labelling and social-emotional learning into the child’s daily routine.

### CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

06.

- Read books or tell stories that include characters experiencing different emotions and discuss why the characters feel that way.
- Play games that involve recognizing facial expressions or guessing emotions from scenarios (e.g., “How do you think the boy feels when his balloon pops?”).



### ENCOURAGE OPEN DISCUSSIONS

07.

- Ask your child how they feel in various situations and why
- Validate their emotions and reassure them that all feelings are normal and okay to express.

### CONNECT EMOTIONS TO PHYSICAL CUES

08.

- Teach your child to recognize emotions through observable signs like tears for sadness or sweaty palms for fear.



## IMPORTANT INSIGHTS FOR PARENTS

- No "Correct" Emotion Concepts
  - There is no single set of physical features that define emotions (e.g., not all sadness involves crying).
  - Children's emotional concepts are dynamic, evolving with time, culture, and social experiences.
- Language Isn't the Only Factor
  - While language plays a critical role in guiding emotional development, it is not the sole driver.
  - Non-verbal interactions, social experiences, and cultural norms also contribute to how children develop emotional understanding.

(Hoemann et al., 2019)

## EMOTIONAL REGULATION

- Challenges in Early Childhood
  - Children aged 4-5 are in a developmental stage characterized by egocentrism and intuitive thinking, which can make emotional regulation difficult.
  - Common challenges include temper tantrums (e.g., crying, screaming, throwing objects) and resistance to rules or parental guidance.
- Benefits of Good Emotional Regulation
  - Helps children react calmly and appropriately, fostering better social relationships.
  - Predicts long-term success in academic and social domains.
- Strategies to Support Emotional-Regulation
  - Teach calming strategies such as deep breathing, counting to ten, or using a "calm-down corner."
  - Help your child recognize and name triggers for strong emotions.
  - Use visual aids (e.g., emotion charts) to help them identify how they're feeling and what they can do next.
  - Acknowledge and validate their emotions while teaching appropriate ways to express them.
  - Reinforce positive behaviors when they successfully manage emotions (e.g., "I'm proud of how you stayed calm and asked for help.").



(Bahn et al., 2021; Muyassaroh & Prasetyo, 2019)

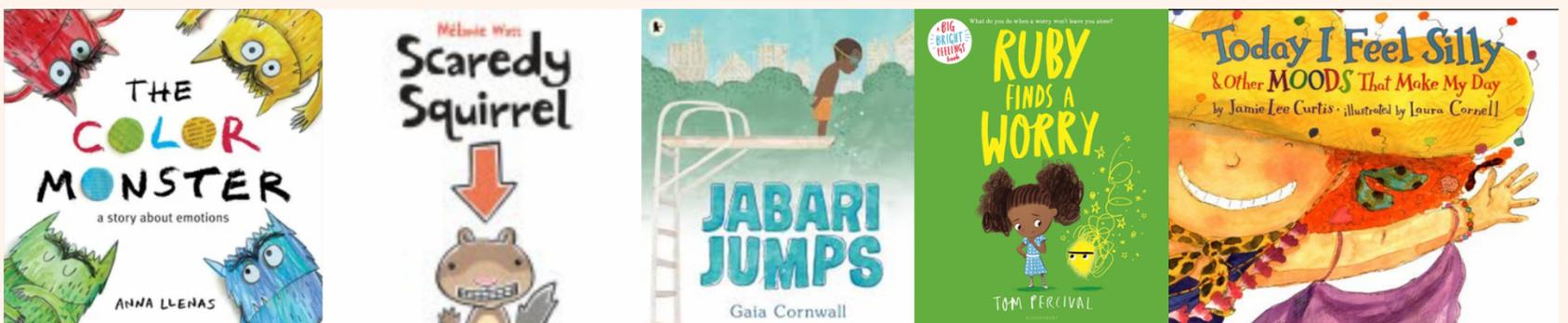
## FINAL TAKEAWAY: BUILDING EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE WITH DLD

- Children with DLD can still acquire and understand emotion concepts, even with language delays.
- Parents play a critical role in modeling and reinforcing emotion vocabulary and regulation skills.
- With support and patience, children with DLD can develop stronger social-emotional and language skills.

(Bahn et al., 2021)

## RESOURCES

Here are some great books on exploring emotions



For more great books: <https://www.doinggoodtogether.org/bhf-book-lists/emotional-awareness-picture-books>

## References

- Bahn, D., Vesker, M., Schwarzer, G., & Kauschke, C. (2021). A multimodal comparison of emotion categorization abilities in children with developmental language disorder. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 64*(3), 993-1007. [https://doi.org/10.1044/2020\\_JSLHR-20-00413](https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_JSLHR-20-00413)
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