

## **Evaluation of a novel intervention, 'Better Conversations with Developmental Language Disorder': feasibility and findings from an experimentally controlled case series.**

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### **Abstract**

#### **Background**

Developmental language disorder (DLD) affects around two pupils in every UK classroom and can impact on education and social well-being (Bishop et al., 2017; Norbury et al., 2016). Thus far, interventions for school-aged children with DLD have been targeted at vocabulary, grammar or narrative skills. This project developed and evaluated 'Better Conversations with DLD' (BCDLD), a new conversation-based intervention. The programme was co-produced and is grounded in Communication Partner Training (Simmons-Mackie et al., 2016) and Parent Child Interaction Therapy (Falkus et al., 2016), both evidence-based approaches used widely across populations with communication difficulty.

#### **Method**

Six children with DLD (6;06 - 8;02 years) participated in BCDLD with their mothers. Each dyad took part in multiple baseline assessment and six conversation-focused therapy sessions. Video feedback was used to highlight facilitative and barrier strategies within their talk and to agree targets for change. Follow-up conversation and language-based measures evaluated progress in response to intervention.

Feasibility of the approach was explored in relation to recruitment, retention and acceptability. Reliability of conversation-based outcome measures was evaluated, alongside practicality of use in clinical practice.

#### **Results**

Following intervention, there was an increase in children's mean length of utterance (in words) and a statistically significant decrease in the use of barrier conversation behaviours for five dyads. Change in child-to-adult ratio of speech was achieved, in line with intervention targets. Children also showed progress on standardised assessments, including the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals.

Feasibility results demonstrate good retention and acceptability, and adequate inter-rater reliability for conversation outcomes.

#### **Discussion**

The results suggest that school-aged children with DLD can benefit from direct intervention to improve their everyday conversation and the approach can produce change on formal language testing.

Feasibility findings provided strong support for the further development of BCDLD. Further co-produced research is necessary to refine the intervention, explore active ingredients and issues of candidacy and implementation within clinical services.

