



Helsinki

**Extensive learning
difficulties, i.e. mixed
specific developmental
disorder**

Definition and diagnosis

Mixed specific developmental disorder (F83) refers to a child having an extensive abnormality in relation to their age level in more than one area of development (language development, perception, motor skills, learning). At the same time, the child may also have difficulties with their concentration or interacting with peers.

Each child develops at their own individual pace. The term 'developmental disorder' is used when a child's development differs significantly from that of their peers and their challenges hinder their ability to function in everyday life. Distinguishing developmental disorders from normal developmental variation is important in order to provide the right kind of support for the child.

The child's challenges in everyday life in different areas of development

- **Language challenges** may involve the child having difficulties with expressing themselves through speech or understanding spoken language. The child's speech may be scarce, fragmentary or unclear. Long instructions or more complex concepts can be difficult for the child to understand. Language challenges are often reflected at school in learning to read and write, or in reading comprehension.
- **Perceptual challenges** can cause difficulties with perception, creating mental images, or perceiving sub-entities, spatial relationships and details. In everyday life, these can be reflected in difficulties with getting dressed, building things, perceiving time or learning maths.
- **Motor skill challenges** are reflected in difficulties with learning gross and/or fine motor skills. In everyday life, this may manifest itself as clumsiness, bumping into things, apprehension or having difficulties with using cutlery, buttoning clothes or using scissors, for example.
- **Challenges with attention and executive functioning** can manifest themselves as impulsivity and difficulties with focusing on what is required. Difficulties can arise in starting or stopping an activity, and in planning the child's own activities. Problems with attention and executive functioning can manifest themselves as either hyperactivity or hypoactivity.
- **Challenges with social skills** can manifest themselves as difficulties with identifying and understanding the feelings of others and taking the perspectives of others into account. It can be difficult for the child to interpret other people's tone of voice, facial expressions and gestures. Challenges with social skills are often reflected in difficulties with participating in play and interacting with peers.



Examinations

A comprehensive understanding of the child's development is formed through multidisciplinary cooperation in health care. The child's development is assessed by a psychologist/neuropsychologist, occupational therapist, speech therapist, physiotherapist, nurse and doctor, depending on the situation. In addition to professional assessments,

the description provided by the child's home and school about their everyday skills provides important additional information about the child's skills and functional capacity. Based on tests and examinations, the doctor issues a developmental disorder diagnosis and the child's potential rehabilitation and support needs are assessed by professionals.

Rehabilitation

The most common forms of rehabilitation are speech therapy and occupational therapy. The aim of rehabilitation is to support the child's growth and development and enable them to participate in everyday life. The objectives of rehabilitation are defined individually to correspond with the child's needs. The child's parents are active operators in the rehabilitation process. They play a key role in transferring the skills that are learnt in rehabilitation into the child's everyday life. Rehabilitation therapists often instruct the child's early childhood education providers to operate in a way that supports the child. The rehabilitation service focuses on children who are under school age.

Monitoring

The achievement of rehabilitation objectives and the child's development are monitored regularly. The monitoring may help to clarify the child's diagnosis. Sometimes a child's skills are strengthened in one area, making their developmental abnormalities no longer extensive. If the child's developmental difficulties increasingly interfere with age-appropriate everyday functioning despite the rehabilitation and support measures provided, the diagnosis may be refined to mild developmental disability. The monitoring typically continues for the duration of the rehabilitation. After that, the monitoring is transferred to the child's school health care services, where specialists in child neurology or child psychiatry can be consulted if necessary.



Support measures in early childhood education and at school

Children are entitled to the support that they need in early childhood education and basic education. The support that is provided can be group or child-specific, e.g. part-time support from a special needs teacher, or full-time support from a special needs teacher in a small group. Learning materials can be differentiated to suit the pupil by focusing on matters that are key to the child's learning objectives or adapting the exercises to suit the child's skill level. The child can be provided with teaching materials in

plain language, as well as concrete and visual aids. The aim is to utilise the child's strengths in the education provided. Experiences of success are important for the development of the child's positive self-image and school motivation. It is essential that the child discovers that they can do and learn things themselves and feels valuable as they are. The support measures provided at school are planned in collaboration with teachers and the child's family, and often with a psychologist or neuropsychologist.

Support provided by the family

A parent's most important task is to provide a safe and loving environment for their child to grow up in. All children benefit from regular everyday life, routines and predictability. Adequate sleep and nutrition, as well as varied activities and free-form play, are essential for a child's growth and development. If

necessary, support for everyday life and parenting can be received from the child's care provider or the City of Helsinki's services for children and families. The parent's own wellbeing enables the child to receive sufficient attention and support for their growth and development.

Notes

Children's specialist appointments
hel.fi/childrens-specialist-appointments



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Children's specialist appointments, City of Helsinki 2026
Susanna Leivonen, paediatric neurologist, M.D.
Alisa Olkinuora, psychologist, MA (Psychology)