

What is DCD?

Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD), also known as Dyspraxia in the UK, is a common disorder affecting fine or gross motor co-ordination in children and adults. This is a lifelong condition with marked impairment in the development of motor skills and coordination that significantly impact on the person's daily life. DCD is an medical umbrella term as it is broad in its criteria. Dyspraxia is a specific type of a DCD which highlights specific difficulties with motor planning. Some children with DCD become more co-ordinated during adolescence. Many continue to experience some difficulties, especially with social skills, organisational skills and time management. But adults successfully adopt coping strategies. They are able to avoid many of the motor problems that held them back at school, for example they no longer need to play football or wear a tie and, because there is more choice, they are able to choose a life style that suits them.

An overview of Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD)



Diagnosis:

- In order to be given a diagnosis of DCD other underlying medical reasons for the difficulties must be ruled out. This needs to be done by a Doctor or a Paediatrician.
- An assessment of motor skills and self care skills can be done by an Occupational Therapist. It is also important to note that there must be a discrepancy between the child/young persons learning ability and their presenting motor and self care skills. For example a 9 year old whose learning ability in school appears to be at the level of 7 years would be expected to have at least the self care and motor skills expected for a 7 year old.
- As soon as a child is 5 years or above enough they can be assessed.
- Multiple sources of information should be used when assessing a child for DCD. These will be collated from parents, teachers and the child.
- A diagnosis is made when there are significant motor difficulties that are not due to a visual impairment, neurological disorder or other medical condition.

Possible difficulties:

- Self-care- dressing, washing, toileting
- Using tools such as cutlery, toothbrush, scissors
- Handwriting presentation and pencil grasp
- Riding a bike/ learning new motor tasks
- Sitting still or upright in the chair
- Playing in groups
- Social and emotional difficulties, including self esteem
- Time management
- Planning
- Personal organisation
- Sensory processing difficulties, also impacting on regulation



Gross motor difficulties:

- Falls, trips and bumps into people and furniture
- Seems awkward when running, may have their arms out to the side or seem unbalanced
- May struggle in PE with catching and throwing, balance and negotiating apparatus
- Doesn't seem to be aware of their own body's boundaries seeming to have poor spatial skills
- Fidgets in their chair or when on the carpet
- Tends to slump over their desks or need to lean against a table or peers
- May struggle to learn to ride a bike
- May struggle in swimming lessons to coordinate their bodies or may lack strength to stay afloat

Fine motor difficulties:

- Appears to struggle using two hands together (e.g. scissors)
- Drawing skills are below what you would expect for their level of learning
- Pre/writing skills are behind what you could expect given their verbal skills and their reading ability
- Tends to avoid construction tasks or appears to find these challenging
- Has delayed self help skills

Social and Emotional difficulties :

- Can lack confidence and be sensitive to criticism
- Can be the quiet child at the back of the class or the 'class clown'
- Can get easily frustrated, angry or anxious
- Often prefers to play with younger children or prefers adult company
- Doesn't make friends easily, limited play during break times
- Often needs to take control of social situations or will prefer to be on their own

Recognising DCD



Sensory processing difficulties :

- Seems to have difficulties regulating own activity levels
- Seems to have difficulty regulating their emotions
- Appears to be unable to filter out noise or visual stimulus
- Can be overly sensitive to loud noises

Cognitive difficulties:

- Poor attention span
- Difficulties with short term memory
- Difficulties sequencing tasks
- Finds it hard to listen, think and do all at the same time
- May talk themselves through tasks to help them organise their thoughts and their actions

Organisation difficulties :

- Difficulties transferring skills
- Difficulties organising own belongings, tray, school bag, equipment for lessons
- May have unkempt appearance (clothes twisted, inside out, back to front, shoes on wrong feet)
- Loses or forgets things
- Gets confused or muddled in their thoughts, their speech or actions
- Struggles to follow a timetable & navigate around the school.
- Doesn't tend to like change in routine at the last minute
- Tends to look to others for prompts as to what to do



Make adjustments at home to encourage greater independence and participation (e.g. elasticated shoes, trousers, easier fastenings on clothes, strategies for organisation and time management).

Provide opportunities for regular practice of activities and exercises by involving your child in everyday activities such as cooking (mixing, spreading), household chores (folding clothes, putting away cutlery, mopping the floor) and simple games (catching a ball, hop scotch).



Try to make sure your child practices meaningful, 'functional' tasks that s/he will come across in everyday life e.g. cooking rather than meaningless finger exercises.

As your child practices and improves, gradually increase the demands of the task e.g. catching a smaller ball, cutting around more complex shapes.



Praise your child for effort, as well as achievement.

Strategies for supporting children with DCD

Use your child's interests as a focus for motivation e.g. cutting out magazine pictures of their favourite hobby.

Let your child choose activities that they particularly enjoy or wish to try.



Encourage practice at every opportunity. 'Little and often' is best for learning – ten minutes every day rather than one long session each week.

Celebrate successes and attribute them to your child's hard work and effort.

Try to ensure that your child practices movement skills in a variety of different ways so that they can generalise to new situations e.g. different activities for ball skills: throwing and catching with different size balls of different weights, with the child in different positions.





Supporting children with DCD in school

GROSS MOTOR

- Ensure correct table and chair height
- Use a sloped writing surface to improve posture
- In PE break down any new tasks in to smaller parts, allow extra time for them to learn the actions
- Use Traffic light strategy of 'stop, think and then do', include auditory cues
- With team games think about the least challenging position or role they can play, such as being in goal during football
- Position the child so they can watch others actions

COGNITIVE SKILLS

- Provide the opportunity to have alternative methods of recording work (Dictaphones, computers, part prepared worksheets, SnapType app)
- Teach and use mind mapping to plan out ideas
- Use bullet points initially rather than having to think about grammar, spelling, lay out and content
- Use visual checklists and timetable to help plan
- Reduce copying from the board, give hand outs
- Encourage traffic light system of 'stop, think, do'
- Break tasks down into smaller chunks/ steps
- Ask them to repeat instructions back



SENSORY PROCESSING

- Provide a quiet work space
- Allow extra time and slow down speech when giving instruction
- Use visual timetables and written cues to support verbal direction
- Allow them to have access to their own fidget toy/ tool. (Give them clear boundaries as to how and when to use. Monitor its use to ensure it is helping improve attention not hinder!)
- A sit 'n' Move cushion or weighted lap pad may reduce the need to fidget
- Encourage movement breaks to do jobs around the class and the school, make them structured and allow them at regular intervals. See 'heavy work' leaflet for further ideas.





Supporting children with DCD in school

ORGANISATION:

- Use pictures as prompts to help with sequencing
 - Use visual aids and props in Maths to help understand more abstract maths problems
 - Allow additional time for changing for PE
 - Provide checklist in pictures to help them identify the pieces of equipment they will need to different tasks. Small visual keyrings can be useful
 - Encourage them to keep their desk space tidy from visual clutter
 - Prompt them to talk through ideas and pre plan their work
 - Give them realistic goals to achieve
- Ensure they do not miss their break times to catch up on work
- Use timers, alarms, watches, personal organisers, mobile phones for homework alarm
 - Encourage parents to consider providing alternative clothing such as Velcro shoes, polo shirt, trousers with elastic waist.

FINE MOTOR

- Trial a chunky pencil, triangle shaped pencil or pencil grip to help with position when writing
- Trial a writing slope board to help provide the arm and the hand with more stability. (An empty lever arch file is a cheap alternative.)
- Use Different media to teach letter formation such as sand, ribbon sticks, foam.
- Use vertical surfaces to give extra feedback for the direction of the movements required. Also good for improved shoulder stability.
- Prior to handwriting have the child do some warm ups including (see isometrics handout)
- Use visual cues such as stickers on the page for where to start or highlighted/ raised lines
- Allow additional time for written tasks.
- Consider the use of ICT equipment to reduce the need to produce long pieces of written work
- Try Peta Long loop scissors

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL

- Ensure success, give praise including for effort
- Try and use their skills to aid difficult tasks or for group work roles
- Choose peers carefully when planning a group, balance positive role models with similar ability children
- Prompt them to acknowledge their own success, marking themselves out of 10 to appreciate effort and improvements
- Provide a safe environment for them or a key person for them to go to if they are struggling or are anxious. A person who is in the same place, such as the librarian and they can then take them to the appropriate person if needed
- Try to integrate strategies in to the day for the whole class not just the child

CHECKLIST

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