

# Understanding and Supporting Children with Dyspraxia.



Dyspraxia, a form of developmental coordination disorder (DCD) is a common disorder affecting fine and/or gross motor coordination in children and adults. It may also affect speech. DCD is a lifelong condition, formally recognised by international organisations including the World Health Organisation. DCD is distinct from other motor disorders such as cerebral palsy and stroke, and occurs across the range of intellectual abilities. Individuals may vary in how their difficulties present: these may change over time depending on environmental demands and life experiences.

An individual's coordination difficulties may affect participation and functioning of everyday life skills in education, work and employment. Children may present with difficulties with self-care, writing, typing, riding a bike and play as well as other educational and recreational activities. In adulthood many of these difficulties will continue, as well as learning new skills at home, in education and work, such as driving a car and DIY.

There may be a range of co-occurring difficulties which can also have serious negative impacts on daily life. These include social and emotional difficulties as well as problems with time management, planning and personal organisation, and these may also affect an adult's education or employment experiences.

Many people with DCD also experience difficulties with memory, perception and processing. While DCD is often regarded as an umbrella term to cover motor coordination difficulties, dyspraxia refers to those people who have additional problems planning, organising and carrying out movements in the right order in everyday situations. Dyspraxia can also affect articulation and speech, perception and thought.

## What causes Dyspraxia?

Although the exact causes of Dyspraxia are unknown, it is thought to be caused by a disruption in the way messages from the brain are transmitted to the body. This affects a person's ability to perform movements in a smooth, coordinated way.

Although Dyspraxia/DCD affects each individual differently some of the common difficulties noted for the child in secondary schools are listed below.

- Motor difficulties
- Movements appear awkward
- Continue to have difficulties in P.E e.g. using sporting equipment
- Difficulty with handwriting; both speed and style
- Poor fine motor skills; manipulating classroom equipment such as maths and science equipment
- Difficulty with dressing and undressing e.g. tying shoe laces,
- Difficulty judging speed & distance
- Poor spatial awareness
- Poor stamina
- Difficulties with organisational skills e.g. handing in homework
- Poor short term memory/copying skills
- Poor social skills – at risk of social isolation/bullying
- Difficulty adapting to new situations
- Literal use of language

## Top tips for support

- Give as much encouragement and positive feedback as possible. It is vital that the child does not lose their self-esteem.
- Ensure you have the child's attention before starting to talk; use their name.
- Reduce background noise wherever possible.
- Talk clearly and slowly but with normal intonation and emphasis.
- 'Chunk' information into natural pieces; leave a pause after each chunk to allow the child to process what you have said.
- Give time for a child to think of/process an answer. Maybe say 'John, I am coming to you next for an idea on...'
- Summarise key points at regular intervals and support this with visual information. It may help a child to use different colours or page formats to help him take notes that are going to be useful for him at a later point, e.g. using mind maps around new topics or words.
- Get the child to talk through plans of what they need to do or write, as this vocalisation can help a child order their thoughts and help gauge their understanding.
- Seating should allow the child to rest both feet flat on the floor and the child be encouraged to sit with upright posture. Never give the child more than 3 - 4 instructions at one time and ensure that you have their attention before the instructions are given
- Using checklists and routines are very helpful with organisation
- Play memory games or motor skill games
- Allow extra time for the completion of a task where possible
- Strategies, although aimed at a few individuals, will likely benefit a whole class. The same strategies are often useful for a range of conditions.
- Talk with the child about what strategies he finds most helpful. This is an important way of establishing a working partnership.

## References: Click the links below;

[movementmattersuk.org](http://movementmattersuk.org)  
[dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk](http://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk)

