

## **Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)** **(Including Dyspraxia)**

DCD is a marked impairment in the development of motor skills and coordination; this has a significant impact on child/young person's occupations, particularly their self care skills and their school life. 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 person's learning ability and their presenting motor and self care skills. For example a 7 year old whose learning ability in school appears to be at the level of 5 years would be expected to have at least the self care and motor skills expected for a 5 year old.

DCD is an umbrella term as it is broad in its criteria. Dyspraxia is a specific type of a DCD which highlights specific difficulties with motor planning.

DCD/Dyspraxia and its associated difficulties appear to change with the age of the child/young person. In primary school the child/young person tends to have difficulties with their play skills and learning basic self care skills as well as learning to write and participating in PE. As a child/young person moves in to secondary education their difficulties tend to manifest themselves in their organisational skills and the planning of their work. They may avoid team games and also struggle with their social relationships as well as often having low confidence and self esteem.

If you think a child/young person in your class may be affected by DCD/Dyspraxia complete the checklist below. This is not a diagnostic tool but it may give you a guide. The advice provided in this pack can be used with the entire class irrespective of a confirmed diagnosis. Some children/young people can make great progress with their coordination and skills by carrying out basic activities and exercises and for these children/young people a diagnosis may not be a priority. However, some

children/young people make progress with their physical skills but they continue to experience motor planning, sequencing and organisational difficulties. It is this population for whom a diagnosis may provide an explanation and support for them, their families and for their education setting.

**Please use the advice and strategies contained in this pack before you make a referral to the Occupational Therapy service.**

## **Checklist for How to Recognise a Child with DCD/Dyspraxia in the Classroom ....**

### **Gross motor difficulties**

- Falls, trips and bumps
- Seems awkward when walking up and down stairs, may do one at a time
- 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 as well as following actions.
- 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 or tends to slump over their desks or need to lean against a table or others when on the carpet.
- May struggle to ride a trike or a bike in the playground.
- May struggle in swimming lessons to coordinate their bodies or may lack strength in the water struggling to stay afloat.

### **Fine motor difficulties**

- Appears to struggle using their two hands together when using 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 tricky
- Has delayed self care skills.

### **Sensory difficulties**

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

### **Cognitive difficulties**

- Poor attention span
- Difficulties with short term memory
- Difficulties sequencing tasks
- Seems to have poor problem solving abilities

- Finds it hard to listen, think and do all at the same time for example creative writing in literacy.
- 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 not have a tidy appearance, leaves 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.
- Most significant difficulties are with new/novel tasks which are not routine or well rehearsed.
- Tends to look to others for prompts as to what to do.

### **Social and Emotional difficulties**

- Seems to lack confidence
- Often seems to be the quiet child at the back of the class or the other extreme 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.

## How School can help

### **Gross Motor.....**

- Ensure that they are in a seat that is the correct height for them to be able to have their feet flat on the floor
- Ensure that their desk is at elbow height to reduce slouching and use a sloped writing surface to improve posture.
- Consider using a 'sit fit' cushion to help challenge their postural control and also provide them with more subtle movement opportunities
- 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! '
- With team games think about the least challenging position or role they can play, such as 'Goalie'
- Put them at the back of the group so they can watch others do the actions and they aren't embarrassed to be at the front and getting it wrong.
- Ensure safety at all times, especially if using apparatus use crash mats and may be provide a 'buddy' to help keep an eye on them.



**Fine Motor.....**

- Consider using different types of scissors such as those with larger loops so they can use more fingers to control them.
- Consider providing a chunky pencil or a triangle shaped pencil to help with finger positioning
- Trial an angled writing board to help provide the arm and the hand with more stability. An empty lever arch file is a cheap alternative.
- Teach the correct pencil grasp by doing the a-ok sign with your finger and thumb, pinching the pencil as it is lay on the desk with the lead pointing towards you and then flipping the pencil so it lands in the web space between your finger and thumb.
- Use Different media to teach letter formation such as sand, water paint.
- Use vertical surfaces to give extra feedback for the direction of the movements required.
- Prior to handwriting have the child do some warm ups including....pressing palms together, pulling each finger tip, press the palms on to the desk, chair push ups with hands flat on the seat pushing their body up.
- Use visual cues such as stickers on the page for where to start.
- Highlight lines to help them sit the letters on them.
- Use graph paper in maths to help them lay out sum.
- If using the whiteboard think about what you can print off to reduce what they have to write in regards to note taking.
- Allow additional time for written tasks.
- Consider the use of ICT equipment to reduce the need to produce long pieces of written work....quality not quantity and also think contents vs. the presentation. What are your priorities for that lesson?

### **Sensory Skills.....**

- Provide a quiet work space if possible
- Allow extra time when talking to the child/young person
- Use visual timetables and written cues to support verbal direction
- Allow them to have access to their own fidget toy, such as stress ball. This will reduce the distraction caused by them searching out something to fiddle with. Give them clear boundaries as to how and why they can use this but be clear that it may be taken away. Monitor its use to ensure it is helping improve attention not hinder!
- A sit fit cushion 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 to avoid them becoming distracted and/or getting in to trouble. The following are activities that provide heavy work for students. All of the activities are 'naturally occurring' activities. This means that they can be easily incorporated into the student's daily routine within the school environment. Again these can be incorporated into movement breaks.
  1. Place chairs on desks at end of day or take down at the beginning.
  2. Erase the dry erase board.
  3. Wash desks or dry erase board.
  4. Help rearrange desks in the classroom
  5. Fill crates with books to take to other classrooms Teachers could ask students to move these crates back and forth as needed.
  6. Sharpen pencils with a manual sharpener.
  7. Staple paper on to the wall for wall displays and bulletin boards.
  8. Have students push against the wall.
  9. Use squeeze toys that can be squeezed quietly on the students lap or under the desk so that the student does not disturb the class.  
e.g a fidget toy.
  10. Do chair push ups.

**\*Refer to the [sensory processing resource](#) pack for more detail**

**Cognitive Skills.....**

- Provide the opportunity to have alternative methods of recording work, such as Dictaphones, computers, tape recorders, part prepared worksheets, scribes...
- Use mind mapping to plan out ideas
- Use bullet points initially rather than having to think about grammar, spelling and lay out as well as content.
- Use visual checklists and timetable to help them plan ahead.
- Reduce copying from the board by printing off from the whiteboard.
- Encourage traffic light system of 'stop, think, do'
- Break tasks down into smaller components
- Ask them to repeat instructions back to you and then ask them to tell you their ideas so it gives them opportunity to plan what they want to do.
- Set clear expectations and time limits.
- Ask them questions to help them problem solve such as 'do you think the answer is a or b' try not to give them the answers but give them clues and encourage them to solve the problem. Reduce the prompts you give them and may be give them open ended questions such as 'what comes next?' if they do struggle follow on with ....'if it was a would that work?' 'if not why not?' 'what needs to be different?' etc.

**Organisation.....**

- Use visual time tables along with now and next cards to reduce their anxiety
- Use pictures as prompts to help with sequencing
- Use visual aids in Maths to help them understand and plan out 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.
- Encourage them to keep their desk space tidy, have the whole class do the same.
- Prompt them to talk through ideas and pre plan their work and actions
- If things change in routine support them to learn, but try to stick with the same routine as much as is possible.
- Give them realistic goals to achieve, make sure they get their play times.
- 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.



### **Social and Emotional Skills.....**

- Ensure success, give praise.
- Think about their skills such as art, acting, singing...how can these be used
- 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 the improvements.
- Provide a safe environment for them or a key person for them to go to if they are lost in school or are anxious. A person who is in the same place, such as the secretary and they can then take them to the appropriate person.
- Try to integrate strategies in to the day for the whole class so as not to single them out.



*The following links are from the Dyspraxia foundation and have free downloads which are extremely helpful for schools.*

[http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/services/ed\\_classroom\\_guidelines.php](http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/services/ed_classroom_guidelines.php)

[http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/services/ed\\_classroom\\_guidelines\\_09.php](http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/services/ed_classroom_guidelines_09.php)

<http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/downloads/downloads.php>

*For information on the motor coordination on line training package for teachers go to [www.sentrain.net/about.asp](http://www.sentrain.net/about.asp)*