

Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD): Leaflet for Secondary School Teachers



This leaflet was produced through a consensus process led by Movement Matters and involving relevant stakeholders and organisations from across the UK.

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 lifelong condition is 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 experience.

An individual's co-ordination 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. These difficulties may also affect an adult's education or employment experiences.

How might the condition affect the child at school?

The child may generally appear awkward and have difficulties with some or all of the following:

- PE and school sports – especially team games where ball skills are required.
- Self-care e.g. dressing before/after PE.
- Handwriting – speed and legibility, copying off the board at the same rate as other children.
- Use of IT – keyboarding, mouse etc.
- Using tools and equipment in the classroom, science lab and workshop e.g. scissors, rulers, saws, burners.
- Learning new motor tasks.

Some children may also experience:

- Difficulties with general organisation and planning, including completing assignments in class or at home.
- Social difficulties e.g. difficulty in making and keeping friendships, working in groups.
- Emotional difficulties e.g. low self-esteem, being withdrawn, anxious.

What can teachers do?

There is much that teachers can do to help the child in school.

- Discuss concerns and strengths of children with DCD with other members of staff.
- Where possible discuss concerns with parents for their experiences out of school.
- Discuss with the student their individual goals and their motivations.
- Seek advice from the SENCo about specific classroom strategies and for exam provision.
- DCD also often overlaps with other developmental disorders including Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, ADHD and ASD - ensure that these are also considered when planning for the student's overall needs.
- Be alert to possible accompanying psychological disorders.
- Assist with planning and organisation e.g. use of colour coding on timetables, books; use of electronic devices to time management, reminders etc.

In order for a child to succeed you need to **support his/her learning** and **encourage him/her to participate** in activities.

You can *support learning* of skills in the following ways:

- Focus on functional tasks of everyday living e.g. learning to play a simple musical instrument (ocarina or hand drum) rather than meaningless hand exercises.
- Use multiple and short sessions as ‘little and often’ is best for learning e.g. five minutes handwriting practice every day rather than one long session per week.
- Encourage the use of cognitive strategies such as goal setting, self monitoring, problem-solving activities e.g. encourage the child to think about what aspects of the task they need to focus on to achieve success.
- Break down tasks into smaller units to be learned; ensure that the child knows what they are working towards and what the end goal looks like e.g. the different components in learning to perform a tennis serve Show specific worked examples so the student can see the process as well as the product that is being asked of them e.g. writing grids, essay plans.
- Use movement for other goals, moving to learn as in cooperative games for social skills - encourage socially appropriate opportunities for movement.

You can *encourage participation* in activities by changing the context in which the child is performing. This moves the focus from limitations just within the child towards consideration of how the environmental circumstances and context can be modified such that the child can participate.

- Make it easy for the child to join in appropriate activities at school. Make ‘reasonable adjustments’ in the school environment e.g. paired working for specific tasks; use of IT for recording in examinations and in class.
- Consider differentiated approaches to learning, teaching and assessment activities, including in Physical Education and Sports. Adjust the demands of the task realigning them to the skill level of the child.
- Grade activities so that they gradually increase in difficulty e.g. at first the child may catch a large ball with two hands then gradually reduce the size of the ball or increase the distance.
- Where support is available (e.g. from a teaching assistant), encourage progress by gradually reducing the level of support as the child becomes more confident and starts to succeed.
- Give the child choice of activities, recognising that this may require a greater range than we typically see e.g. individual work in the gym may be preferable to team games.
- Consider opportunities for the student to participate in physical exercise and activities that allow socialisation with their peer group. Encourage partner work with a friend who is empathetic yet challenging.
- Praise the child for effort as well as achievement.
- Celebrate successes – when the child is successful attribute this to his/her hard work and effort.

What if difficulties continue to impede progress?

Seek advice from the school SENCO and together:

- Seek advice from the special educational support services.
- Implement strategies as necessary on the child’s IEP or its equivalent (via the Code of Practice).
- Collaborate with the Health Service, seeking advice, typically from: Occupational therapist, Physiotherapist, Education psychologist. If there is deterioration in functioning or concern over the diagnosis it may be necessary to seek advice from the Paediatric services. This can usually be done through the GP.

What happens next?

- Discuss career options, and what support may need to be provided.
- Plan early for transition from secondary school to further, higher education and employment. Discuss how the change in surroundings and new task challenges may impact on the student.

Where can I go for further information?

www.movementmatters.org.uk