

# Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) or Dyspraxia - A Guide for Parents

Staffordshire Parent Partnership Service



Parent Partnership Helpline 01785 356921

## Definition

All children are individuals and develop at differing rates. However, although some children develop more slowly than others, they all follow more or less the same path, achieving the same milestones along the way, particularly in terms of their physical development.

Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD), which is now the preferred term for Dyspraxia, is a medical diagnosis given when a child has a marked impairment in the development of motor (or physical) coordination. Sometimes a child may achieve developmental stages in a slightly different order, or even miss them out completely.

It is unusual for a child to be diagnosed with DCD before they start school, as physical skills are very much still developing in all children at this age.

A medical diagnosis of Developmental Coordination Disorder may be given when a child fits the following criteria:

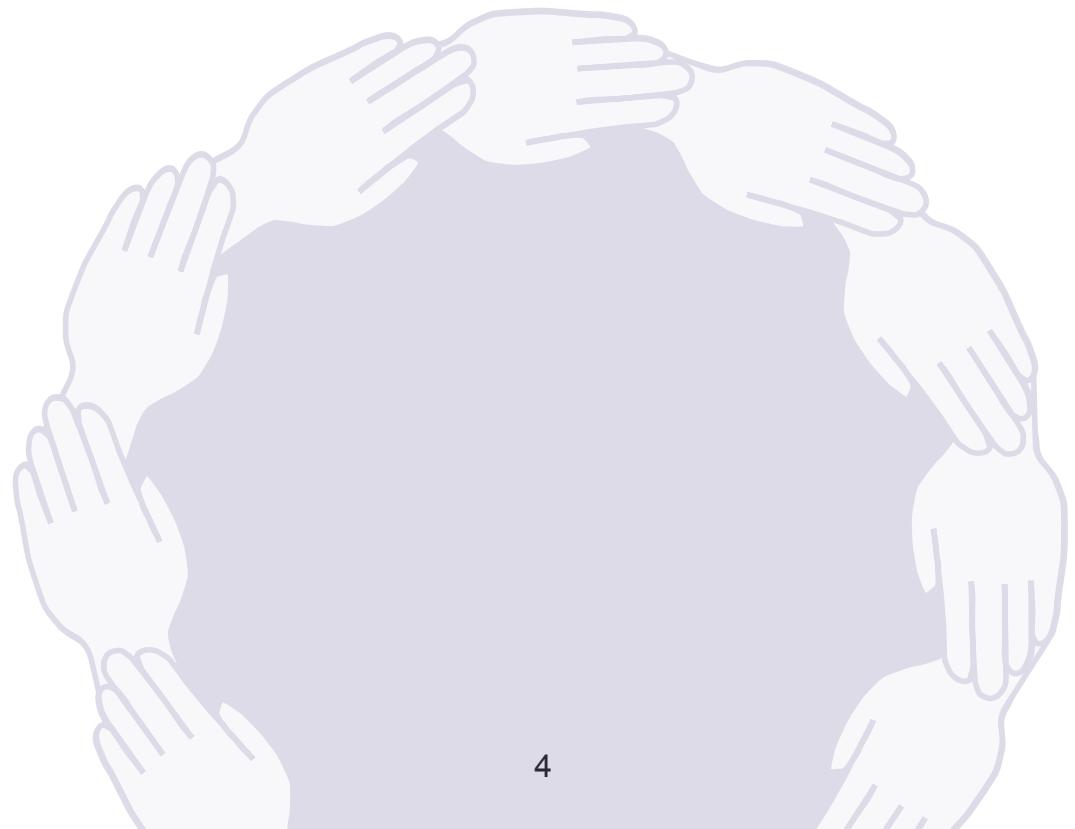
- The ability to carry out activities using physical skills is well below that expected given the child's age and learning development.
- The difficulties significantly interfere with the activities of daily living or progress at school.
- The difficulties are not due to a general medical condition such as cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy, and the child has not been diagnosed with autism.
- If the child has general learning difficulties, the physical difficulties are greater than would be expected.

However DCD is not all about difficulties. Children may be good at problem-solving; many are artistic or good with computers (ICT). Every child has things they like and are good at. It will help if you try to discover and celebrate these strengths and work with the school to develop them. It is important to keep a child's self-esteem high.

## Occurrence

Developmental Coordination Disorder may occur in people from all backgrounds, cultures and abilities. It is thought to affect between 5 to 7 per cent of the population. Very often there is a family history of DCD, or other specific learning difficulty, e.g. dyslexia.

If you feel that your child is experiencing coordination difficulties, or has problems with carrying out fine and/or gross motor skills which may be affecting his or her performance in school, this may be the time to talk to your child's teacher to discuss your concerns.



# **Signs**

The appendix (page 16) gives more detail of some of the difficulties which may be experienced, but the main problems are:

## **Gross Motor Skills (big movements)**

The child may:

- be late in achieving motor milestones, e.g. sitting, crawling, walking, talking. Some may miss out certain stages, e.g. crawling
- be low-toned or floppy - seem to have little control of the muscles, particularly around the joints. If there is low tone around the hips and shoulders, this may result in difficulty in being able to sit upright in a chair or on the floor
- have difficulty in maintaining balance, whilst sitting, standing, walking, climbing, etc, and may become very nervous and apprehensive
- have difficulty in coordinating both sides of the body such as when going up and down stairs or riding a bike

## **Fine Motor Skills (small movements)**

The child may:

- have lack of strength in hands and immature grasp, which may cause difficulty in holding and manipulating objects, doing up and undoing buttons and zips, using cutlery, brushing teeth, etc
- have difficulty in using thumb and index finger in a pincer grip to pick up small objects
- be unsure which hand to use when writing, throwing, using scissors, etc
- have poor grip and control of pencil or crayon when writing or drawing

# What should I do if I think my child has DCD?

If you are worried about your child's progress then always speak to your child's school or early years setting. You may wish to make an appointment to see the class teacher or the school or Early Years SENCo (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator). If you feel you would like support when you talk to staff, you can always take along a friend or someone from the Parent Partnership Service. They can be contacted on 01785 356921.

School staff may be able to reassure you that adequate progress is being made. However they may share your concerns that your child is experiencing some difficulties and you may wish to seek medical advice. This can happen in one of two ways:

Either

- you should take your child to see your GP, who may then refer on to a paediatrician. This may result in input from a physiotherapist and/or an occupational therapist.

Or

- your child's teacher or SENCo (with your permission) will involve the school nurse, who may then refer on to a paediatrician.

# What can the school do to support my child?

The health professionals will advise both you and the teachers on the best ways to help your child. Some teachers may have received training on DCD and have experience of supporting children with these difficulties.

Teachers regularly assess a child's progress to help them plan new work. If they are concerned about a child's progress the teacher will look at how they can adapt their teaching to help the child learn. This may include making small changes to the way the lesson is taught, the materials that are used and equipment provided, or the support given to a child or group during normal teaching.

A small number of children need even more support, see section on "School Action and School Action Plus".

In addition the school can make a referral to the Physical Disability Support Service (PDSS). This is a team of people with particular expertise in working with children with physical difficulties. The school will then work with them and with you to draw up a programme of help and support.

If you are not sure what the PDSS does, then ask for a copy of the leaflet "Key People involved in meeting children's special educational needs", which will explain this for you. This leaflet is available to download at [www.staffordshire.gov.uk/spps](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/spps), or ring the Parent Partnership Service on 01785 356921 who will send you a copy.

[www.staffordshire.gov.uk/spps](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/spps)

## School Action and School Action Plus

If your child's difficulties are such that they are placed at School Action or School Action Plus, the school will usually set up an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Classroom Support Plan. You, and your child, will be involved in setting targets for this. At School Action Plus, agencies from outside the school or other specialists may also be asked to give their advice. Your child's progress will then be regularly monitored and reviewed. If your child is meeting their targets and making good progress, it may be possible to reduce the support. If not, then the school will be able to adapt the support as necessary.

A booklet explaining School Action and School Action Plus in greater detail is available from Staffordshire Parent Partnership Service on 01785 356921 or can be downloaded from the website at [www.staffordshire.gov.uk/spps](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/spps).

The Local Authority, together with partners Entrust, supports every school through their different teams. These teams include advisory teachers from SENSS (Special Educational Needs Support Service), and EPs (Educational Psychologists), who work closely with members of the Physical Disability Support Service. These people can help school and parents draw up a programme of support.

This may include:

- looking at the school's assessments of the child
- reviewing the strategies that have already been tried
- helping to consider how the child's needs can be met
- thinking about how the school could adapt the learning environment
- planning what to do next
- drawing up an IEP or Classroom Support Plan
- providing appropriate training for school staff.

# **Helping your child at home**

All the professionals involved will work with you so that you can help your child. For example, the physiotherapist or occupational therapist may provide some exercises which your child can practise at home, or give ideas to help with daily living skills such as washing, dressing or feeding.

There are some easy-to-read books that you may find useful, as they give many tips on activities to help a child at home. These include:

**"Developmental Coordination Disorder - Hints and Tips for the Activities of Daily Living"** by Morven F Ball (published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London) ISBN: 1-84310- 090-8

**"Dyspraxia - The Hidden Handicap"** by Dr Amanda Kirby (published by Souvenir Press [Educational and Academic] Ltd, London) ISBN: 0-285-63512-3

**"The Adolescent with Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD)"** by Amanda Kirby (published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London) ISBN: 1-84310-178-5

You may also find the following book particularly interesting, as it was written by a 16-year old girl who has dyspraxia:

**"Caged in Chaos - A Dyspraxic Guide to Breaking Free"** by Victoria Biggs (published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London) ISBN: 1-84310-347-8

## **Other sources of help**

There are currently several dyspraxia support groups in Staffordshire:

Stafford Dyspraxia Group; contact Mandy on 07944 001606 or email [mandy.binns.uk@googlemail.co.uk](mailto:mandy.binns.uk@googlemail.co.uk)

Tamworth Dyspraxia Support Group; contact Keely on 01827 702511 or email [keelybrammer@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:keelybrammer@yahoo.co.uk)

Nationally there are two centres which provide support for children with DCD and their families. This includes running courses for parents and professionals and providing advice and resources:

### **The Dyspraxia Foundation**

8 West Alley, Hitchin, Herts SG5 1EG

01462 454986 (Mon. - Fri. 10.00 - 1.00)

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

email: [dyspraxia@dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk](mailto:dyspraxia@dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk)

The Dyspraxia Foundation has support groups and runs social events for parents and children.

### **The Dyscovery Centre**

Felthorpe House, Caerleon Campus, Lodge Road, Caerleon,  
Newport NP18 3QR

01633 432330

[www.dyscovery.co.uk](http://www.dyscovery.co.uk)

The Dyscovery Centre runs a message board on its website where parents can share experiences and ask for comments and advice. They also produce a good booklet "Dyscover Yourself" for children to help them understand their dyspraxia.

## Resources

Many of the resources available for children with other forms of disability are sometimes very suitable for those with DCD. Many can be bought online:

Helen Arkell Dyslexia Centre	<a href="http://www.arkellcentre.org.uk">www.arkellcentre.org.uk</a>
Views of a Dyslexic Child/dyslexic resources	<a href="http://www.iamdyslexic.com">www.iamdyslexic.com</a>
Literacy aid	<a href="http://www.penfriend.biz">www.penfriend.biz</a>
RNIB - online shop	<a href="http://www.rnib.org.uk">www.rnib.org.uk</a>
Advice on choosing books	<a href="http://www.bookmark.org.uk">www.bookmark.org.uk</a>
Crossbow Education (games and resources)	<a href="http://www.crossboweducation.com">www.crossboweducation.com</a>
LDA (resources and games)	<a href="http://www.ldalearning.com">www.ldalearning.com</a>
Barrington Stoke (secondary age reading material)	<a href="http://www.barringtonstoke.co.uk">www.barringtonstoke.co.uk</a>
Teenagers with dyspraxia	<a href="http://www.dyspraxicteens.org.uk">www.dyspraxicteens.org.uk</a>

## **For ICT (computer) equipment:**

**Enabling Technology Ltd**  
[www.enablingtechnology.net](http://www.enablingtechnology.net)  
Castlefields  
Stafford  
ST16 1BU

Tel: 01785 243111  
email: [into@enablingtechnology.com](mailto:into@enablingtechnology.com)

**Crick Software Ltd**  
[www.cricksoft.com](http://www.cricksoft.com)  
Crick House  
Boarden Close  
Moulton Park  
Northampton  
NN3 6LF

Tel: 01604 671691  
email: [into@cricksoft.com](mailto:into@cricksoft.com)

**Inclusive Technology Ltd**  
[www.inclusive.co.uk](http://www.inclusive.co.uk)  
Gatehead Business Park  
Delph New Road  
Delph  
Oldham  
OL3 5BX

Tel: 01457 819790  
email: [inclusive@inclusive.co.uk](mailto:inclusive@inclusive.co.uk)

**Iansyst Ltd**  
[www.iansyst.co.uk](http://www.iansyst.co.uk)  
Fen House  
Fen Road  
Cambridge  
CB4 1UN

Tel: 01223 420101  
email: [info@iansyst.co.uk](mailto:info@iansyst.co.uk)

## **REM**

www.r-e-m.co.uk  
Dunbell Industrial Estate  
Bridgwater  
Somerset  
TA8 4TP

Tel: 0845 3754475

## **SEMERC**

www.semerc.com  
Angel House  
Sherston  
Malmesbury  
Wilts  
SN16 0LH

Tel: 01666 843293  
email: sales@semerc.com

## **Other resources:**

### **Multi-Sensory Learning Ltd**

www.msl-online.net  
Highgate House  
Creaton  
Northants  
NN6 8NN

Tel: 01604 505000  
email: info@msl-online.net

### **Toe by Toe**

www.toe-by-toe.co.uk  
8 Green Road  
Baildon  
Shipley  
W Yorks  
BD17 5HL

Tel: 01274 598807  
info@toe-by-toe.co.uk

**Smart Kids (UK) Ltd**  
[www.smartkids.co.uk](http://www.smartkids.co.uk)  
5 Station Road  
Hungerford  
Berkshire  
RG17 0DY

Tel: 01488 644644  
email: [sales@smartkids.co.uk](mailto:sales@smartkids.co.uk)

**Learning Materials Ltd**  
[www.learningmaterials.co.uk](http://www.learningmaterials.co.uk)  
Dixon Street  
Wolverhampton  
WV2 2BX

Tel: 01902 454026  
email:[learningmaterials@btinternet.com](mailto:learningmaterials@btinternet.com)



# APPENDIX

## Some possible additional difficulties

### Visual Problems

The child may have difficulty with:

- hand-eye coordination - catching a ball
- foot-eye coordination - kicking a ball
- reading - finds it hard to follow a line of print across a page
- copying from board - looking from one thing to another and being able to refocus.
- judging distance and depth - may knock over a cup when reaching for it.

### Language and Communication Difficulties

- speech may be unclear or slow to develop
- may not be able to establish good eye contact
- may not recognise 'non-verbal' messages - this can result in inappropriate behaviour.
- may be unaware of own body position in relation to others and may stand too close,
- may be unaware of own appearance
- may have a difficulty with the use of language, and not understand when 'leg pulling' is taking place, but rather take everything very literally.

## Behavioural and Emotional Difficulties

### The child

- may display very immature behaviours, and over-react, e.g. burst into tears over a trivial problem, laugh too loudly
- may be easily distracted and appear not to be listening. This may be due to inability to 'filter out' unwanted sights or sounds, or the fact that they are concentrating on balancing and sitting still
- may be totally disorganised, and unable to perform what should be simple tasks such as finding the right clothes to wear
- may be aware of how they are 'different' from others, and may suffer from low self esteem
- may be keen to succeed, but due to their difficulties, often feel that they have failed
- may be misunderstood by their peer group, and may have been the subject of bullying

### Variability

The child will almost certainly have 'good days', when they are able to achieve a lot with the minimum of fuss, and 'bad days', when nothing seems to work well and the child becomes frustrated and anxious. This change can even happen from hour to hour, and it is therefore important that this is understood and allowances are made for it.

# **Impact on the Child and Family**

## **As a parent you may feel that:**

- every morning is a nightmare trying to get your child organised and ready for school
- the child compares less favourably than siblings
- meal times are difficult for everyone - a potential battleground!
- you are frustrated at not knowing how best to help your child
- you do not know enough about DCD (dyspraxia)
- you find it hard to understand why your child may be able to behave well at school, but throws tantrums and is very irritable at home
- you do not understand why your child may be, for example, intellectually at an 11-year old stage, but behaves emotionally more like a 6 year-old
- your child displays very inconsistent behaviour, so you never know what to expect next.

## **The child may feel:**

- tired most of the time
- that everyone always seems to be shouting or nagging at them
- worried and apprehensive about the day ahead
- that they are blamed for things that are not their fault or that are beyond their control
- that no one seems to understand that they really are trying their hardest - it is still never good enough.

## **Siblings may feel:**

- Angry with their brother or sister, even though knowing that it isn't really his or her fault
- Jealous as their brother or sister seems to receive more attention from their parents
- Embarrassed by his behaviour, especially in front of friends, yet protective because they do not want their brother ridiculed or bullied by others.

**However, with help and support from their families and other people, children with DCD can be very happy and successful.**

## **Leaflets produced by Staffordshire Parent Partnership Service include:**

- Information for parents/carers who have children with special educational needs - General.
- Information for parents/carers who have children with special educational needs - Early Years.

## **Information packs:**

- Supporting your child's educational needs - General.
- Supporting your child's educational needs - Statutory Assessment.
- Supporting your child's educational needs - Early Years

## **General Leaflets:**

- Dyslexia - a guide for parents.

Copies of these can be obtained from:

**Staffordshire Parent Partnership Service**

**Telephone: 01785 356921 (Minicom service available)**

**E-mail: [spps@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:spps@staffordshire.gov.uk)**

**[www.staffordshire.gov.uk/spps](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/spps)**

If you need help in preparing for a school meeting or would like an Independent Parental Supporter to attend a meeting with you, call the Parent Partnership Helpline.



The Parent Partnership  
Service Helpline  
can be reached on  
**01785 356921**

Staffordshire Parent Partnership is funded by Staffordshire County Council. It operates independently as a confidential service for parents/carers of children with special educational needs.

## Notes





*working together for your child*

This leaflet was produced by Staffordshire Parent Partnership Service with the help of local voluntary groups and of parents of children with special educational needs.

If you, or someone you know, would like a copy of this booklet in large print, Braille, on audio-tape or in languages other than English, please contact the Parent Partnership Service on 01785 356921.

email: [spps@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:spps@staffordshire.gov.uk)  
[www.staffordshire.gov.uk/spps](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/spps)