

What are the signs that your child might have

DEVELOPMENTAL CO-ORDINATION DISORDER?

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Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD) impedes one's ability in planning, coordinating and executing motor skills. A child with DCD would struggle with gross and fine motor skills, spatial and sensorial awareness, or speech. (1)*

DCD can surface in different forms and severity. For instance, one child can exhibit difficulties with getting dressed, buttoning up shirt, and catching a ball while another child struggles with processing information, handwriting and speech. DCD also has a profound impact upon other areas of developments. Incompetency in daily tasks may have a negative effect on the child's social and emotional developments. This can manifest in behavioural issues when the child enters school. (2)

Research has found that DCD can exist in isolation or co-occurring with other learning difficulties such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), dyslexia or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (3).

Often seen as a 'hidden handicap', DCD is not easily detected. However, if a child shows significant delay in his or her motor or speech developments over a prolonged period of time, parents may want to investigate. Often, children with DCD struggle to master self-help skills that should have been acquired across the developmental stages of childhood.

The following table provides a guideline for signs and symptoms of DCD during the early years: (2,4)

TODDLER

- ◆ Messy eater, preferring to use fingers to spoon for long spell
- ◆ Unable to ride tricycle or play ball
- ◆ Delayed at becoming toilet trained
- ◆ Avoid or dislikes playing with construction toys, puzzle or Lego
- ◆ Slower in speech development.

PRE-SCHOOLER

- ◆ Continue to be messy and fussy eater
- ◆ Often bumps in people and things
- ◆ Difficulty in learning to jump and skip
- ◆ Slow to develop left / right hand dominance
- ◆ Tends to drop objects or has difficulty holding them
- ◆ Has trouble grasping things (like pencil) and writing or drawing
- ◆ Has difficulty with dressing, buttoning and zipping
- ◆ Poor writing skills
- ◆ Sensory issues
- ◆ Difficulty in carrying out instruction and completing activities
- ◆ Lack of imaginative play – may not enjoy dress up or playing appropriately say in dress up corner
- ◆ Slower response time to verbal instructions



* According to the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*, *developmental coordination disorder (DCD)*, also known as *dyspraxia*, is categorised under *Neurodevelopmental Disorders*.

References

1. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. (n.d.). *Developmental Dyspraxia Information Page*. Retrieved April 25, 2017, from <https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/All-Disorders/Developmental-Dyspraxia-Information-Page>
2. Dyspraxia Foundation. (2015, March 23). *Dyspraxia at a glance...* Retrieved April 25, 2017, from <http://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/about-dyspraxia/dyspraxia-glance/>
3. Mountstephen, M. (2010). *Meeting Special Needs: A practical guide to support children with Dyspraxia*. London: Practical Pre-School Books.
4. Patino, E. (n.d.). *Understanding Dyspraxia*. Retrieved April 19, 2017, from <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/dyspraxia/understanding-dyspraxia#item3>



What to do if you suspect your child has

DEVELOPMENTAL CO-ORDINATION DISORDER?



Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD) affects one's ability in executing motor movements as desired. One may observe that the child behaves clumsily or lacks skill in performing motor tasks. In some cases, children may be delayed in their speech development. (1)*

Before pressing the panic button, it is important to note that each child develops differently and at different pace. For example, a child may take a longer time to master cutting skills but acquires other motor skills age appropriately. Similarly, a child can be very skilful in drawing but struggles to catch a ball. Parents need to recognise that these are developmental differences that impact one's abilities and not necessary caused by DCD.

If there is a list of tasks that a child fails to master concurrently over a period of time and it impacts his or her daily functionality and behaviours, parents may want to investigate. For instance, a 5-year-old child is starting to avoid motor-skilled tasks or feeling incompetent because he or she still struggles with dressing up, packing bag and using a pair of scissors to cut.

Parents can discuss with the school teachers to ascertain if they have the same concerns and findings about their child. Parents should also observe and record your child's developments and difficulties to gain more insights and understanding of your child's condition.

Should you feel concern after taking such observations, seek professional help by consulting your child's General Practitioner. Notes from your

observations will provide insightful details about your child's condition should the General Practitioner decide to refer your child to other professionals. Children with motor skills weaknesses are referred to occupational therapists for motor skills training while children with speech issues are referred to speech and language therapists for speech- language therapy.

Although children with DCD do not outgrow the condition, they can learn to overcome their difficulties through interventions. The earlier the child receives intervention, the better the chance of the child developing coping strategies throughout the years. Intervention can take the form of targeting at the child's weaknesses and worked on improving them (task-oriented approach) or of improving the child's sensorial or perceptual awareness that is necessary for motor-skill performances (process-oriented approach).(2)

At home, parents can learn more about DCD from books, journals or websites. They can also speak to professionals or other parents whose children have DCD to get advice and support. Parents can provide tremendous support for your child's condition by accommodating to your child's weaknesses and appreciating your child's strengths. For instance, if your child struggles with handwriting, perhaps a pencil grip can help. Alternatively, when your child grows older, he or she can choose to type instead of write. Optimise your child's strength so that he or she can feel competent.

Parents need a lot of patience and understanding to raise children with learning difficulties. Lower your expectations and celebrate little and big moments of achievements. Set achievable targets with your child and work towards them in small steady steps. Parents can learn how to accommodate or adapt to your child's learning difficulty so to be more efficient in coping with DCD.

* *According to the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), developmental co-ordination disorder (DCD), also known as dyspraxia, is categorised under Neurodevelopmental Disorders.*

References

1. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. (n.d.). *Developmental Dyspraxia Information Page*. Retrieved April 25, 2017, from <https://www.ninds.nih.gov/Disorders/All-Disorders/Developmental-Dyspraxia-Information-Page>
2. Kirby, A. (2010). *Children with Development Co-ordination Disorder (DCD) (also known in the UK as Dyspraxia)*. Retrieved April 15, 2017, from <http://www.cheri.com.au/documents/DCD2010Overviewhandout.pdf>

