

What is Dyspraxia?

Dyspraxia at a glance...

Dyspraxia, a form of developmental coordination disorder (DCD) is a common disorder affecting fine and/or gross motor coordination, in children and adults. 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. Although Dyspraxia may occur in isolation, it frequently coexists with other conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), Dyslexia, language disorders and social, emotional and behavioural impairments.

What causes Dyspraxia?

For the majority of those with the condition, there is no known cause. Current research suggests that it is due to an immaturity of neurone development in the brain rather than to brain damage. People with dyspraxia have no clinical neurological abnormality to explain their condition.

How would I recognise a child with Dyspraxia?

The pre-school child:	The school age child:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is late in reaching milestones e.g. rolling over, sitting, standing, walking, and speaking• May not be able to run, hop, jump, or catch or kick a ball although their peers can do so• Has difficulty in keeping friends; or judging how to behave in company• Has little understanding of concepts such as 'in', 'on', 'in front of' etc• Has difficulty in walking up and down stairs• Poor at dressing• Slow and hesitant in most actions• Appears not to be able to learn anything instinctively but must be taught skills• Falls over frequently• Poor pencil grip• Cannot do jigsaws or shape sorting games• Artwork is very immature• Often anxious and easily distracted	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Probably has all the difficulties experienced by the pre-school child with dyspraxia, with little or no improvement• Avoids PE and games• Does badly in class but significantly better on a one-to-one basis• Reacts to all stimuli without discrimination and attention span is poor• May have trouble with maths and writing structured stories• Experiences great difficulty in copying from the blackboard• Writes laboriously and immaturally• Unable to remember and /or follow instructions• Is generally poorly organised

Developmental dyspraxia is surprisingly common in both children and adults. As a “hidden disability” it is not immediately obvious to onlookers that the child or adult who is affected has any special needs. Indeed, many will have been unfairly labelled as lazy, clumsy, forgetful, disorganised, disruptive and out of step with their peers.

What is Dyspraxia?

Dyspraxia is an *impairment or immaturity of the organisation of movement*. It is a lifelong condition that can affect small and large muscle movements and generally results in lack of body coordination and poor awareness of the body in space – hence lots of accidents, feelings of failure and low self-esteem.

Physical activities:

- Hard to learn – the individual movements are hard if not impossible to coordinate and combine, particularly for complex activities which also involve travelling such as running, riding a bike or driving a car.
- Harder when activity is out of sight, such as fastenings on the back of clothes or when using toilet tissue.
- Difficult to remember and generalise – this is why people with dyspraxia can appear to have learned a skill one day and forgotten it the next.
- Movements appear hesitant and awkward.
- Difficulty carrying out everyday activities that others take for granted, such as tying shoe laces or using a knife and fork.

Communication:

- Speech may be immature or unintelligible in the early years.
- Language may be impaired or late to develop.
- Verbal dyspraxia – for some children the primary difficulty is making and coordinating the precise movements necessary for the production of spoken language – this can occur in isolation or together with general motor coordination difficulties.
- Handwriting is often very challenging for people with dyspraxia

Organisation:

- Difficulty planning and organising thoughts.
- Difficulty foreseeing problems and things through alternatives.
- Difficulty planning for and remembering personal and school activities.

Social & Emotional:

- Difficulty listening in group conversations
- Difficulty understanding facial expressions and social norms with poor ability to pick up on non-verbal messages
- Poor performance in activities that others enjoy, such as playing football or learning to swim can isolate people with dyspraxia from their peers.
- Perception of self as ‘lazy, clumsy, naughty’ – this often results in low self-esteem and behavioural problems

For some people, dyspraxia is not picked up early in childhood so they carry this “hidden” disability into adult life. Adults with dyspraxia may find themselves employed in jobs far below their capabilities and they may have on-going problems with everyday tasks such as cooking and domestic chores.

How common is Dyspraxia?

Dyspraxia is thought to affect up to 6% of the UK population – many experience severe difficulties with everyday practical activities, social relationships and organising their thoughts, language and actions.

As a result they can appear disorganised, lazy clumsy and rude. Everyday tasks such as dressing eating, toileting and writing are distressing and difficult and as a result children and adults with dyspraxia have consistently low self-image and self-esteem.

People with dyspraxia feel they have failed at so many things, no matter how hard they try – in fact it is society which has failed them by taking so long to recognise their condition and to put into place social, medical and educational facilities to help them. And although dyspraxia can cause problems in the classroom, it is no indication of academic ability and people with dyspraxia can be very bright.

How would I recognise a child with dyspraxia?

Early recognition of the symptoms of dyspraxia can make a big difference to the lives of children and those around them.

The Dyspraxia Foundation has a range of leaflets, booklets and information on the website which can help adults recognise the symptoms of dyspraxia in:

- Preschool children
- Primary-age children
- Secondary age children
- College age young adults
- Adults

How can parents and teacher help children with Dyspraxia?

Early recognition enables the special educational and social needs of the child with dyspraxia to be identified, and there is much that can be done to help alleviate the distress of children who struggle with the condition.

If you suspect your child has dyspraxia, talk to your GP and Health Visitor: they can refer your child to a paediatrician or a Child Development Centre. The appropriate psychologist, physiotherapist, speech and language therapist or occupational therapist can then assess your child for dyspraxia.

The Dyspraxia Foundation has produced two leaflets: *Dyspraxia – Classroom Guideline* and *Dyspraxia – Secondary Classroom Guidelines*, which outline:

- Common difficulties for children with Dyspraxia
- How these difficulties impact on teaching and learning at school
- Classroom strategies to alleviate or minimise the problems at school

The Dyspraxia Foundation welcomes input from children and young people, parents and carers, teachers and clinicians and is currently working on a best-practice *Dyspraxia-Friendly Schools* campaign.

Problems experienced in childhood may continue into adulthood. If as an adult you suspect you may have dyspraxia, initial contact should be made with your GP who may refer you to a clinical psychologist, consultant neurologist, physiotherapist or occupational therapist. The Foundation's Adult Support Group may also be able to help.

What about the future?

Although dyspraxia cannot be cured, symptoms in children and adults can lessen if they are given appropriate treatment and practical support to minimise the day-to-day difficulties that they experience. Awareness and understanding are key to taking away the stigma of dyspraxia and a positive approach can help boost self-esteem and to ensure that people affected by the condition can reach their full potential.