

Adjustments for P.E. for those with dyspraxia/DCD



Developmental coordination disorder (DCD), also known as Dyspraxia in the UK, is a common disorder affecting fine and/or gross motor coordination in children and adults. It can also affect speech. DCD is a lifelong condition, 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 experiences.¹

Whilst dyspraxia/DCD is primarily a motor disorder, in many cases individuals may experience difficulties with memory, perception and processing along with poor planning, organisation and sequencing skills which can have a significant negative impact on everyday activities. Although, the condition may occur in isolation, it frequently coexists with other conditions such as ADHD (attention deficit hyperactive disorder), dyslexia, language disorders and social, emotional and behavioural impairments.

Why is P.E. often difficult for children with dyspraxia/DCD?

As gross and fine motor difficulties are affected many children may experience some or all of the following difficulties:

Balance	fall over, wobble, difficulty standing on one leg
eye hand coordination	catching balls, aiming, predicting how fast a ball is approaching or moving
eye foot coordination	difficulty with trapping a ball, kicking with good direction
motor planning	difficulty planning the correct movements needed to carry out a task so difficulty with climbing onto and off apparatus
stamina	tire easily, have difficulty with long distance running
spatial awareness	difficulty accurately predicting people moving around them so knock into others or objects, cannot find an open space
speed of processing	difficulty being able to coordinate all their movements into a timed response so may miss the ball
short term memory	remembering rules

¹ <http://www.movementmattersuk.org>

fine motor skills	changing for and after lesson
Self organisational skills	Forgetting and losing PE equipment and kit, lose change of clothes

The problem with team sports

Children with dyspraxia/DCD often find team sports particularly challenging. Apart from the physical difficulty of manipulating equipment such as a bat, having a good aim or catching or kicking a ball, their difficulties often result in:

- a struggle of constantly observing their surroundings
- reacting quickly to the changing environment
- manouvering themselves around others and the pitch
- tiring quickly
- anticipating the reaction of others
- anticipating the speed, distance and direction of the ball
- staying focused for the duration of the game
- understanding the rules and strategies of a game.

As team games are usually competitive it may lead the child to feel frustrated and have feelings of low self-esteem.

Strategies to help

- Allow the child to have Velcro instead of laces or buttons on their clothing
- Not all children can learn by watching others, those with coordination difficulties may need to be taught all skills.
- Help the child to position himself properly before starting an activity by placing his feet and hands correctly. Use the child as a model to demonstrate the starting position to the rest of the class. Provide hand-over-hand guidance to help children feel the movements.
- Give clear instructions one at a time, allowing the child time to organise their body into the right position before the next instruction is given.
- Use a variety of equipment to help the child throw and catch such as scarves, balloons, bean bags, kooshes, juggling balls, large balls before moving onto tennis balls
- Use larger bats as well as ordinary balls and get the child to bat a balloon first or use their hand before moving onto batting with a smaller ball
- Use music, counting or a rhythmic rhyme to reinforce movement patterns. Some children have difficulty getting started or knowing what to do next so using repetitive phrases such as “I can move my left arm, left arm, left arm, I can move my left arm just like this” may help.
- Provide children with a marked spot, gym mat or hoop on the floor to indicate the “space” that they should return to when directed by the teacher. It helps the

child to have somewhere to aim for, rather than wandering aimlessly or getting in the way of other children.

- Use cones, lines on the floor or other markers to indicate the area in which the activity is to take place. This will help children to contain their movements if they are prone to “over-shooting” when moving around.
- Encourage the children to verbalise their plans for movement. For example ask the child what they are going to do next, do they need to throw harder or not so hard? Should they aim more to the left or right? What could they try to improve their performance?
- Encourage children to beat their own records for example, how many times they are able to bounce and catch a ball. Asking the class “How many people beat their own record?” gives the child with dyspraxia the chance to share their success.
- Where appropriate allow the child with dyspraxia to continue to focus on skill development, rather than team games.
- Only give a few rules and instructions at one time and ensure the child knows these before giving more
- Reward effort and participation

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