



Do You Know A Child Who Is Clumsy?

A flyer for coaches
and sports instructors

Do you know a child who is motivated to participate in sports activities at first, but they experience significant frustration when they just can't seem to "get the hang of it"? While other children learn and progress with good instruction, this child may seem to learn slowly and may show very little improvement from one practice session to another.

Children with these types of difficulties may have *Developmental Coordination Disorder* (DCD). Even though many people have never heard of it, DCD affects about 5% of school-aged children in North America. Children with DCD have trouble learning to coordinate their movements and may appear to be awkward or clumsy. These children often struggle with participation in organized sports and leisure activities. Activities that are hardest for them are those that require new learning and those that require coordination of their bodies in response to things that move (like balls, pucks and other children).

Repeated failure experiences cause children with DCD to eventually withdraw from physical activities altogether. They often cannot overcome the physical challenges, and they begin to feel isolated from their peers.

If children with movement difficulties avoid or drop out of physical games and activities then, over time, they will develop poor overall fitness and low self-esteem. With encouragement and individualized instruction, children with DCD can receive enjoyment from the activities they participate in and be healthy throughout their lives.

What might you see in a child with movement difficulties?

- Appears clumsy or uncoordinated
- Is slow to learn new motor skills
- Requires more instruction than other children
- Works hard but is often unsuccessful; becomes frustrated easily
- Has difficulty with ball skills (catching, throwing, kicking) and activities that require good balance (running, hopping, jumping, skipping, climbing stairs)
 - May demonstrate distracting or disruptive behaviour
 - Demonstrates decreased interest or motivation, poor self-esteem
 - May withdraw or avoid coming to practices and games

How can you help a child with movement difficulties?

- REWARD EFFORT!
- Encourage participation and fun rather than competition
- If possible, provide one-to-one instruction for new skills
- Break down skills into smaller, meaningful parts
- Use different teaching methods to demonstrate the skill (show the movement while using words to describe it)
- When giving feedback, use clear and specific language (raise your arm up higher when you throw)
- Provide hand over hand instruction (e.g., have child demonstrate a new skill to a group with the instructor guiding the movement)
- Keep the environment as predictable as possible when teaching a new skill
- Review rules of game play when the child is not concentrating on the movements
- Modify or adapt equipment to ensure safety
- Provide frequent verbal instruction and encouragement
- Ask questions to ensure that the child understands the game rules or movements required

For more information, please go to www.fhs.mcmaster.ca/canchild.