



Occupational Therapy



Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)

Pre-Diagnosis Information Booklet

Other DCD resources / links are available by contacting childrens.otservice@highland.gov.uk

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What is DCD?

Developmental co-ordination disorder (DCD) is a condition that affects physical co-ordination. It causes a child to find daily activities more difficult.

Children can appear to move more slowly, awkwardly and/or clumsily than their peers. They are less accurate when carrying out activities that involve motor skills, such as catching a ball, handwriting or shoelaces.

DCD was previously known as dyspraxia, and often people still refer to it as this.

Possible signs

Nursery age

- Difficulty with construction toys, such as Duplo or jigsaws.
- Difficulty with fine motor skills during play.
- Struggles to sit on a chair at a table to do play activities.
- Struggles with ball skills, such as throwing and catching.

Primary school age – all of the above, plus:

- Difficulties in P.E. and other physical activities.
- Messy handwriting and difficulties with laying out work.
- Have difficulty with friendships, as a lot of playground games use coordination skills, e.g. football or skipping.
- Difficulties with dressing, including buttons and shoelaces.

Secondary school age – all of the above, plus:

- Refusing to go to school, or reluctant to go on certain days. This may be on days with P.E. or more handwriting.
- Difficulties with completing work on time.
- Poor or slow handwriting.
- Difficulties with working memory and other aspects of executive functioning.

Diagnostic criteria

Diagnostic criteria are statements that people have to meet in order to be given a diagnosis. For DCD the criteria are:

- A person must have significant coordination difficulties, showing as clumsiness, slowness or inaccuracy.
- A person's coordination skills must be significantly below those expected for their age.
- These difficulties must have existed from an early age.
- These difficulties must significantly and persistently impact on to day-to-day life, such as schoolwork and self-care.
- Difficulties must not be better explained by another difficulty, such as a learning disability or visual impairment.

To diagnose or not to diagnose?

Deciding on whether to go through the diagnostic process can feel like a big decision.

Getting a diagnosis will not change your child or make them 'worse'.

A diagnosis can help a child, and those around them, understand their difficulties better and what they can do about them. It can also allow them to focus on their strengths. This can help later in life with things such as getting support for at university and picking the right career.

"I'm not going slowly, I've got DCD. I'll do it at my own pace" (Girl, aged 18)

"Thanks, that makes a lot of sense. Can you explain it to my teacher?" (Boy, aged 7, after being given the diagnosis)

"It's helped to explain a lot of things. He's learned to do a lot of new things; we just break them down more. We try to focus on what's important and let the other stuff go" (Parent, child aged 10)

Diagnostic Process

The assessment will consist of the following:

- Parent / carer information gathering
- A clinic appointment to carry out a standardised coordination assessment
- A functional skills assessment
- Possibly a home and / or school visit
- An appointment with a community paediatrician

For your information, professionals in the Highlands follow the advice and guidelines provided by the EACD (European Academy of Childhood Disability), which is a large group of specialised professionals working across Europe.

Further information & resources

NHS

The National Health Service's website has further information on DCD

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/developmental-coordination-disorder-dyspraxia/>

Can Child

Can Child is a non-profit research and educational centre based in Canada.

<https://canchild.ca/en/diagnoses/developmental-coordination-disorder>

Highland OT Workshops

Children's Occupational Therapy in the Highlands run a series of workshops on coordination, self-care & fine motor skills. For further details and to book on, email children.otservice@highland.gov.uk

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