

Dyspraxia is the medical term for clumsiness. It used to be known as 'clumsy child syndrome' and currently in the USA it is known as developmental co-ordination disorder.

It is thought that some 10 per cent of the population is affected, and that 70 per cent are male. It is different from dyslexia, which is difficulty with words or numbers, although children with either condition will benefit from the same therapeutic approach.

Dyspraxia children do not appear to be obviously different from other children, and the condition can be very difficult to diagnose. It is thought to be an immaturity of the brain that results in messages not being transmitted effectively.

Signs of dyspraxia include clumsiness, confusion over left and right hands, poor body awareness and posture, poor short-term memory and forgetfulness, difficulty in holding pens, writing and reading difficulties and poor sense of direction. They may be disadvantaged in their physical activities; they may find they cannot catch a ball, ride a bicycle until much later than usual, skip or run without tripping. They can have problems with organizational skills and perceiving time, and not be very aware of dangers. It takes them longer to learn new and unfamiliar tasks.

The good news is that as the brain develops and the children become older, they do become more capable. Useful therapies include physiotherapy, special exercises, co-ordination practice and hand-eye co-ordination techniques. Osteopathy, acupuncture, homeopathy and herbalism are all worth trying. For further information, the book 'Living With Dyspraxia - Handy Tips' by Michelle Leigh is worth getting. You can also contact the [Dyspraxia Foundation](#) in London.

The bottom line is your child may never make the Olympic team, but he can certainly enjoy normal sports and games with the rest of his age group and obtain an average standard.

Gross Motor Skills

large muscle, active, inactive, outdoor, indoor, daily living activities

What is involved?

- body awareness
- movement awareness
- spatial awareness
- predicting
- timing
- reacting to directions
- problem solving
- assessing and adapting
- muscle-memory
- coordination
- control
- motor-recall

- judgments

Movement Skills

Locomotion

- walking
- running
- skipping
- jumping
- hopping
- galloping
- chasing
- fleeing
- dodging
- climbing

- crawling

Manipulation

- throwing
- catching
- collecting
- kicking
- rolling
- punting
- dribbling
- volleying
- striking
- squeezing

- pushing

Stabilization

- bending
- stretching
- twisting
- turning
- rolling
- balancing
- transferring
- curling
- landing
- flexing

- hanging

How we can support Children with Dyspraxia.

Not all children can learn by watching others, those with co-ordination 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.

Children with coordination difficulties can find it hard to catch, throw and hit balls so have a variety of

equipment available, for example balls with ribbon tails, larger bats and beanbags as well as ordinary balls.

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? 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.

Children with dyspraxia often cope with PE lessons that focus on learning skills. They struggle when they have to apply these skills in a group or team setting when the environment is constantly changing. They often feel they are letting their team down and may choose to opt out of team games. Where appropriate allow the child with dyspraxia to continue to focus on skill development, rather than team games.

Older children

Focus on the development of physical skills rather than on team sports. Young people with dyspraxia find it very difficult to plan their movements while at the same time responding to an ever-changing environment with lots of distractions.

Keep the environment as predictable as possible while teaching new skills.

Sports involving ball skills or the manipulation of objects are often more difficult for young people with dyspraxia.

Provide opportunities for participation in alternative sport activities that will still help the young person to develop strength, stamina and physical fitness.

Non-competitive sports such as golf, climbing, rowing, cycling, martial arts, yoga and swimming are often more

appropriate for young people with dyspraxia. They are also "life-style" sports that can be continued into adulthood.

Young people with dyspraxia may do well at running on a track, but are more likely to trip when doing cross country because of the uneven ground. Young people with dyspraxia should always wear appropriate safety gear when cycling and so on as they are at greater risk of falling or knocking into people and objects.

Encouraging general physical activity in children of all ages

Difficulties with motor co-ordination often affect children's participation in physical activities both at school and at home.

Frequent failures mean that children may not be motivated to join in or to try new activities and their physical difficulties

