

Understanding dyspraxia

Developmental coordination disorder (DCD), and how tutoring can help

Also known as DCD · for parents and carers of primary aged children

Dyspraxia, known to doctors as **developmental coordination disorder (DCD)**, affects how the brain plans, organises and carries out movement. It affects around **5 in every 100 children**, so one or two in most classes, and is diagnosed more often in boys. It is not related to intelligence and is not caused by anything parents did. Clinicians use DCD for the movement difficulties; “dyspraxia” is often used more widely to include the organisation and planning difficulties that commonly come with it.

How it can show

Larger movements

Running, balancing, catching, riding a bike, PE and playground games. Often bumps into things or trips.

Fine movements

Handwriting, using scissors and cutlery, buttons, zips and shoelaces.

Organisation and planning

Getting ready, packing a bag, keeping track of belongings, and working through the steps of a task.

Memory and processing

Following instructions with several steps, copying from the board, and judging space, direction and left and right.

The hidden impact

Children with dyspraxia often know they are slower or clumsier than their friends. Being picked last, struggling with everyday tasks and being told their writing is messy can wear confidence down. Anxiety is common, and friendships can be harder.

Strengths worth noticing

Determination and persistence, creativity, empathy, strong verbal skills and imaginative problem solving. Many have learned to work hard from an early age.

Often found alongside

ADHD (very commonly), dyslexia, speech and language difficulties, autism and anxiety.

In the classroom

- Handwriting that is slow, tiring, sometimes painful, and hard to read.
- Written work much shorter than the ideas your child can explain out loud.
- Difficulty setting out maths, lining up columns or using a ruler.
- Taking longer to change for PE, get out equipment or tidy away.
- Becoming very tired, because tasks others do automatically need full concentration.
- Avoiding activities they find hard, which can be mistaken for laziness.

“Every child learns, some just need a different path.”

Nicola, Moss Grove Tutoring

Separating ideas from handwriting

The single most useful step for many children with dyspraxia is to stop handwriting holding back their thinking. In sessions your child can talk ideas through, plan with pictures or keywords, and use a keyboard where that helps, while handwriting is practised separately in short, focused bursts. Their real ability then has a chance to show.

What sessions look like

- **Fine motor warm ups:** playdough, pegs, threading and tweezers games before writing.
- **Handwriting support:** posture, grip, pencil grips, sloped boards and suitable paper.
- **Keyboard skills** as a long term alternative for longer writing.
- **Maths made manageable:** squared paper, layout frames and hands on equipment.
- **Step by step task cards** and checklists that build organisation.
- **Movement breaks** and extra time, because concentration on movement is tiring.
- **Praise for persistence**, so effort is noticed as well as results.

Working together

A short update after each session shares what has been practised and any small adjustments worth trying at home or school. With your permission, Nicola can link with your child's teacher or SENCo, and follow any advice from an occupational therapist or physiotherapist.

Being realistic

Tutoring does not replace occupational therapy or physiotherapy, and DCD does not go away. But skills do improve with regular, well planned practice, and the right adjustments can make school much easier.

Consistency matters most: short, regular practice beats occasional long sessions.

Small things that help at home

- Practise dressing, laces and cutlery at calm times, not when rushing out of the door.
- Break everyday tasks into steps, with a picture checklist if it helps.
- Choose kit that makes life easier: elastic laces, velcro, chunky pens.
- Encourage activities that build strength and coordination, such as swimming or climbing.
- Allow extra time in the morning so getting ready is not a daily battle.
- Praise effort, and celebrate small gains in independence.

If you are looking for a diagnosis

Talk to your GP or your child's school SENCo. DCD is usually diagnosed by a paediatrician, often with an occupational therapist or physiotherapist, and is not normally diagnosed before age five. **Your child does not need a diagnosis to receive SEN support at school;** support should be based on need.

Where to find out more

Dyspraxia Foundation: dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

NHS: nhs.uk, search "DCD in children"

SENDIASS: free, impartial advice on SEN support in school. Search "SENDIASS" with Gloucestershire or Herefordshire.

About Nicola

Nicola has worked in primary schools since 2003 and has been a Higher Level Teaching Assistant since 2008, specialising in special educational needs, including running nurture groups.