

DEVELOPMENTAL COORDINATION DISORDER (DCD): INFORMATION FOR EDUCATORS



Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects the development and performance of motor skills. Children with DCD may experience difficulties with activities that require coordination, balance, motor planning and sequencing.

DCD can affect participation in everyday classroom activities, play, sport and self-care. Importantly, these difficulties are not due to a lack of effort, motivation or intelligence.

How might DCD present in the classroom?

A learner with DCD may:

- Take longer to complete written tasks.
- Experience difficulty with handwriting, drawing or cutting.
- Struggle to organise materials or complete multi-step tasks.
- Find it difficult to copy from the board.
- Have difficulty with buttons, zips or shoelaces.
- Drop or knock over objects frequently.
- Avoid activities that involve movement.
- Become tired or frustrated during tasks requiring coordination.
- Need additional time to learn and practise new motor skills.

How can educators support learners with DCD?

Small changes can make classroom participation easier:

- Give clear, simple instructions and break tasks into steps.
- Allow additional time for tasks when needed.
- Reduce unnecessary copying from the board.
- Provide printed notes or alternative ways to record information.
- Allow assistive technology where appropriate.
- Keep frequently used materials in accessible places.
- Give the learner opportunities to practise new skills without pressure.
- Focus on participation, progress and strengths rather than speed or perfection.

Remember

A learner with DCD may need to use more effort to complete tasks that appear easy to others. Understanding their needs and providing appropriate support can help them participate confidently and successfully at school.

Handwriting and DCD: Information for Educators

Why can handwriting be difficult?

Handwriting requires several skills to work together, including fine motor control, visual-motor coordination, motor planning, posture and attention. Children with DCD may find these processes more difficult and may require additional time and practice.

A learner may experience:

- Slow or effortful handwriting.
- Difficulty forming or spacing letters.
- Inconsistent letter size.
- Difficulty copying from the board.
- Hand or arm fatigue.
- Difficulty keeping up with written work.
- Frustration or avoidance of writing tasks.

Supporting handwriting in the classroom

Consider:

- Providing additional time for written tasks.
- Reducing the amount of copying required.
- Providing worksheets or printed notes.
- Allowing alternative ways of demonstrating knowledge.
- Using lined or adapted paper where helpful.
- Ensuring the learner has a comfortable and stable seating position.
- Giving short opportunities to practise handwriting rather than expecting lengthy practice sessions.
- Focusing on legibility and functional participation rather than perfect handwriting.

Consider alternatives

Where appropriate, learners may benefit from:

- Typing or assistive technology.
- Oral responses.
- Worksheets with reduced writing demands.
- Visual supports.
- Speech-to-text technology.

The aim is to support the learner's ability to communicate and participate, rather than making handwriting the barrier to demonstrating what they know.

Classroom Setup for Children with DCD

Creating an accessible classroom

The physical organisation of a classroom can make everyday tasks easier for children with DCD. A predictable and organised environment can reduce unnecessary demands on coordination, movement and planning.

Practical strategies

Keep materials accessible

Store frequently used items where learners can reach them easily. Clearly labelled and consistent storage spaces can also support organisation.

Reduce unnecessary obstacles

Keep walkways clear and provide enough space for learners to move safely between desks, activity areas and equipment.

Consider seating

A stable and supportive seating position can help with activities such as writing, cutting and using classroom materials.

Provide clear instructions

Break complex activities into smaller steps. Visual instructions, demonstrations and checklists can help learners understand what is expected.

Allow extra time

Some learners with DCD may take longer to organise their materials, move between activities or complete written work. Allowing additional time can reduce pressure.

Support transitions

Give advance warning when changing activities and provide clear routines. This can help learners prepare for what comes next.

Encourage independence

Support should not mean doing everything for the learner. Instead, identify where assistance is needed and gradually encourage the child to develop their own strategies.

An inclusive classroom focuses on removing barriers so that every learner has meaningful opportunities to participate.

Physical Education and DCD

Understanding participation

Physical Education (PE) can be challenging for some children with DCD because many activities require coordination, balance, timing and motor planning.

A learner may find it difficult to:

- Catch or throw a ball.
- Run, jump or change direction.
- Follow movement sequences.
- Learn new sporting skills.
- Maintain balance.
- Participate in team games.
- Keep up with peers during fast-paced activities.

These difficulties should not be interpreted as a lack of interest or effort.

How can PE be adapted?

Educators can support participation by:

- Demonstrating activities clearly.
- Breaking complex movements into smaller steps.
- Providing additional opportunities for practice.
- Using larger or adapted equipment where appropriate.
- Allowing more time to complete activities.
- Reducing the speed or complexity of an activity.
- Offering different ways to participate in team games.
- Pairing learners thoughtfully during activities.
- Focusing on participation and skill development rather than competition alone.

Encourage participation

Children with DCD may avoid physical activities if they have experienced repeated difficulty or embarrassment. Creating a supportive environment where mistakes are accepted can help build confidence.

PE should provide opportunities for every learner to experience movement, develop skills and enjoy being active.

The goal is not to exclude children from activities they find difficult, but to adapt activities so that they can participate meaningfully.

Conclusion

Supporting learners with Developmental Coordination Disorder is about understanding their

individual needs and creating an environment where they can participate without unnecessary barriers. Small adjustments in the classroom, handwriting activities and Physical Education can make a meaningful difference to a learner's confidence, independence and participation.

By working together, educators, parents and healthcare professionals can identify challenges early, build on each learner's strengths and provide practical support. **With the right understanding and adaptations, children with DCD can participate, learn and thrive at school.**