



What is Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)? —A parent handout—

Details

- A condition that is present in 5-6% of all children, where the acquisition and execution of coordinated motor skills is substantially below what is expected for that child's age, and is not explained by other motor, neurodevelopmental, psychological, social conditions, or cultural background.
- It can and often co-occurs with other neurodevelopmental and neurobehavioral disorders, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), learning disorders, specific language impairment, and developmental dyslexia or reading disorder.
- These delays significantly and persistently interfere with the child's participation in daily activities.

What are signs of DCD?

Physical Signs:

- Can be described as "clumsy"
- Has difficulty with gross motor (whole body skills) and/or fine motor (using hands) skills
 - ◆ Has difficulty playing sports
 - ◆ Has difficulty with schoolwork due to poor handwriting
- Takes an excessive amount of time to learn new motor skills
- Has difficulty with activities that require constant changes in body position or adaptation to changes in the environment

Emotional/Behavioral Signs:

- Avoids or appears uninterested in activities that require gross and/or fine motor skills
- Secondary emotional responses, such as low frustration tolerance, decreased self-esteem, and lack of motivation
- Avoids socializing with peers
- Has difficulty organizing his/her desk, locker, or homework

When can it be diagnosed?

- Due to the large variability in normal motor development, it is not recommended for a child to be diagnosed under the age of five, except in cases of severe impairment.

How should it be diagnosed?

- By a pediatrician, pediatric neurologist, or psychiatrist after conducting parent/patient interviews, medical and developmental history review, questionnaires, clinical examination, motor tests, and assessments covering participation restrictions in various environments (e.g. home, community, school).

Who can treat DCD?

- **Physical therapists:** Physical activities (e.g. running, jumping, climbing, etc.)
- **Occupational therapists:** Activities of daily living (e.g. shoe tying, washing, putting on/removing clothes, feeding, etc.)

Untreated DCD has been shown to persist into adolescence in 50-70% of cases.

What can you as a parent/guardian do?

- If you are concerned that your child may have DCD, make sure to contact your primary care provider with your concerns. Be prepared to answer the questions (as mentioned above in the 'how should it be diagnosed' section)
- Break down different tasks and practice prior to having the child engage in that activity with peers to increase proficiency and confidence
- Provide adaptations to your child's environment to achieve greater success
 - ◆ Proper sitting posture
 - ◆ Adaptive writing utensils and writing surface
 - ◆ Provide extra time
- Reinforce your child's strengths! Many children with DCD demonstrate strengths in different areas, such as reading, creativity, and oral communication
- Continue to encourage your child and provide a lot of positive reinforcement. Make participation, not competition, the major goal
 - ◆ Many children with DCD develop depression due to their participation limitations, so be aware and seek professional help
 - ◆ Many children with DCD develop obesity due to a lack of activity; provide healthy eating habits and activities
- Provide them with role models who have become successful even with DCD, such as Cara Delvigne (model and actress), Daniel Radcliffe (actor), or Florence Welch (singer)

References:

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- Missiuna C. Does your child have DCD? *Understanding Developmental Coordination Disorder.* Today's Kids in Motion. Fall 2003. 22-25.
- The Understood Team. *Understanding Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD).* Understood.com website. <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/child-learning-disabilities/dyspraxia/understanding-developmental-coordination-disorder-dcd>. December 24, 2019.

Questions?

Contact Nancy Smith, PT, MPT, Director of Physical Therapy Services:

nancys@ptnmail.org / 310.328.0276 x321

1815 W. 213TH Street, Suite 100, Torrance, CA 90501

1406 Obispo Avenue, Long Beach, CA 90804

www.PediatricTherapyNetwork.org